

BOYS

OF THE

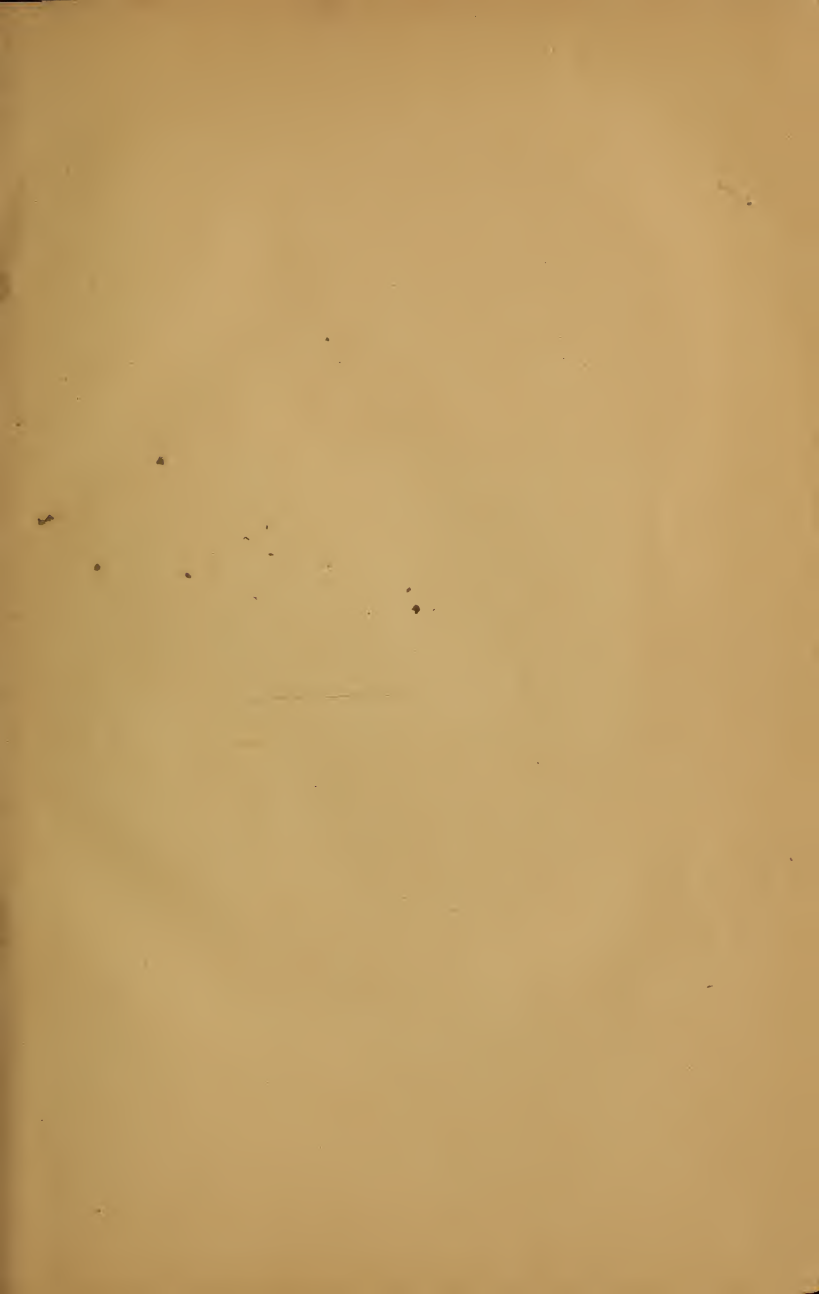
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# The Boys

OF



# THE BIBLE.



THE

# BOYS OF THE BIBLE.

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BY  
*ewell*  
HENRY L. WILLIAMS, JR.  
"

With Six Elegant Illustrations,

ENGRAVED BY  
JOHN W. ORR.

FOURTH EDITION.



*c d*  
NEW YORK:

JAMES O'KANE, 484 BROADWAY.

SAN FRANCISCO: H. H. BANCROFT & CO.

MDCCCLXVII.

1867.

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## P R E F A C E .

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MANY and many are the books which are set before the eyes of youth, day after day, to show examples in man of the great qualities which have lifted one human being over others. The history of our times, of that of civilized heathens, of savage pagans, and of total unbelievers in any creed at all, has been searched over and over again to find for display such men as Philip and Alexander of Macedon, Xerxes, Cæsar, Leonidas, William the Conqueror, Charles the Great, and the Twelfth of that name but of another realm, Napoleon, and the rest whose titles will occur as readily to all.

They are not subjects to be held up for imitation. Great gifts are dross when applied wrongly, for a ploughshare of iron, a tool of steel, are far better than if made of gold or diamonds.

Who will believe that the little drops which we have drawn from the Fount of all wisdom, power, and love,—that for which men that are men ever thirst,—will sparkle less brightly, obscured though they have been by an humble pen, than the gout of crime-spilt blood, on the blade of those who lived and fought for themselves too often, for their land seldom, for their fellow-man, their neighbor, as Christ distinguishes it, less often still.

For themselves. Yes ; can he be happy who misuses all the boons which only the Almighty and the Ever-generous could bestow, which ungrateful man alone can mal-administer ? He puts himself upon a throne, they bow and kneel around him, and he lets the lie go unchecked which attributes to him power over earth and sea.

For their land. This is more, for then they say, they may think it, that it is their mother and they cannot

show to her what thankless children they are, but as what do they dare to parade themselves under heaven? They defend that mother, live for her, give their whole mind for her (that mind which is as surely of God as the body is of the dust), and die for her. They forget the Father, who always is by, is around them, while the mother, like the Son, "is not with them always."

For their neighbor. This over and above the rest.

Far above, very far above this, that, and the other, is the living and dying in God. The heroes named were instruments of His, but they are heavy mallets or piercing nails, cups of gall or the cruel sword, while the true heroes are the types which are blessed by being let print the Living Word.

To these are devoted the pages that follow. All that is strong, pure and good upon them is the Bible; all that is weak, tarnishing and faulty — because humanly wrought — is the man's. As he has endeavored to place the tiny rills of the Source in confines which shall make their beauty all the more prominent, instead of foolishly and wrongly trying to upraise banks to overshadow them, so he hopes the unutterable brightness of the gems will prevent the setting being in the least noticed.

As fragments of a rock may be be formed into a new mass which will not resemble the first in shape, and will yet have in little most of its benefits, so those leaves, taken tenderly and reverently from the Holy Writings, are hopefully sent forth.

Recollecting he was once a boy, and that he is to the best of his ability a lover of religion while no lover of disputes on tenets, clearly not to be debated with youth, the author gives his lines good-bye, and trusts his desire to please will find at least one "welcome" — that of the present reader.

H. L. W., JR.

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# THE BOYS OF THE BIBLE.

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## JOSEPH.

JACOB, (the son of Isaac, who was son of Abraham, who was descendent of Shem, son of Noah, the good man who was saved from the deluge) had wandered from the former living-place of the race of God's chosen people, and dwelt in the Land of Canaan, where he was surrounded by strange people. But he had great property in what was the real wealth in those early days: that is cattle of all kinds. His family was numerous, for he had twelve sons well grown up. Jacob, or Israel, as God said he should be called, loved Joseph, more than any other of his sons, because Joseph's mother was the Rachel whom he had labored so hard to win for wife, and whom he had so loved that his fourteen year's service for her seemed but a little while he was waiting. As a token of his especial favor to this child of his old age, he had made for him a coat of many colors; the others, busy in farming and herding and living simply, dressed as plainly as well might be in sheepskins and coarse homespun. The other sons could not be pleased with this setting up of a person, a little boy compared to them, above them all, (for their father made the youth an overseer to them also), and they vented their disfavor in many ways.

If there was a sheep, goat or a cow strayed, the brothers always gave to Joseph (who was about sixteen or seventeen), the trouble of going to seek them, perhaps wishing

he would fall in with wild beasts, who prowled around the pasturages, and be harmed ; if there was a well dried up, it was always Joseph, under some pretext, who was lowered into it to find out whether some stone had not turned away or blocked up the spring, and, perhaps, those who made him do this, would not have been ill-pleased if the bad air in the pit had poisoned him ; and they hated him at last so deeply that they would hardly let him be at all near them, and never shared with him the wild fruit found in their going out and coming in with their herds and flocks. And if they were singing or laughing or playing on a reed, and saw his bright clothes coming near them, they would stop in what they were doing, for fear he should have a little share of their enjoyment. They would not answer except roughly his most civil questions, and they were as much estranged from him as they could make themselves.

The pure sky of the East, and the gentleness of a shepherd's life make most men of a musing turn. Joseph, like others, young as he was, and especially because he was refused admission to his brother's sports, was wont to spend the hours between his meal-times and his housing of sheep, in resting in the shade, either viewing the landscape, watching the bees taking the honey from the flowers under the very noses of the browsing lambs, and flying off to their home in some old cedar tree's hollow, or the wild pigeons dotting the blue heavens or whirling around under the clouds. The sounds were few, and they were too low or came from too great a distance to trouble his half-slumbers ; the rustling gliding of a snake over the leaves fallen from a wild vine, the lowing of cattle, the caw of the crow away off in a scarcely visible sycamore. Once in a while, though, Joseph was roused to action by the bleating of a terrified ewe, whose lambs were in danger from an asp or a viper, and, springing to his feet, he would rush to the res-

cue with his staff, and free the poor shivering animals from their terror; or, perhaps, he would hurl stones into a thicket to make sure that it was a fox and not a shadow only that had attracted his eyes. But, steeped in semi-sleep he was half the time of his loneliness. Not idle, though; his mind was wondering at the Creator's marvels, —the things of earth around him, the things of heaven above.

In those distant days, there were no good books for man to reach God by, and God himself spoke to those He loved by his angels or by dreams. One day, Joseph went over to his brothers, and having begged their attention, for he wished the information he might expect from those who were so much older than himself.

"I fancied," he said, "dear brothers, that we were all harvesting in the wheatfield, and had each of us made our sheaf a piece, which were lying on the stubble ground when, all of a sudden, my bundle stood up, and yours stood up, too, but they all bowed down to mine."

"What, child," said Reuben the eldest, "you reign over us?"

"Do *you* dream of dominion over us?" echoed Judah fiercely. "Get you back to your sheep; let them bow down to you first!"

And even Naphtali, the gentle, and little Benjamin, the youngest of all, had no words of kindness to the youth they thought so presumptuous. They were all the harsher and more unkind after this to the dreamer. Time passed, when soon he again had a vision, and, terrified almost at so awfully grand a one, he hastened to tell it to his companions, who, somewhat alarmed, were enraged at him.

"In my dream," said he, "the sun, moon, and the eleven brightest stars bowed down to me!"

This he told to his old father as well as his brethren, and Israel was angry at him and rebuked him,

"Boy, think you I, your mother and your brothers, are to be servants of yours? Your dreams are too presumptuous."

But, in spite of all, the old man remembered the striking dreams, and thought of them often, while the others envied their brother. Time was before long that the men were all gone to Shechem, bearing the grain for the feeding of the flocks grazing there, and Israel was anxious about them. So he called Joseph to him and ordered him to go and see if nothing had happened to either the animals or the herdsmen, and hasten back with the news. Joseph drew his belt tighter, took his staff, saw that his goatskin boots were fastened well on his legs to guard against the point of stones, the entrance of the hot sand, the scratch of poisonous grasses, or the bites of insects or serpents, and, putting a piece of bread in the bosom of his gay coat, and stringing his skin bottle by his side, he started from Hebron Valley, and reached Shechem. There was not a single herdsman or a sheep to be found far or near within sight. No answer came to his calls, except the mocking calls of ravens or the howls of beasts disappointed in the departure of their prey, and it was in vain that he ran up on the hill-tops, or down into the hollows.

Fortunately in his searches, he met a man, who, after the "Peace to you," asked what or whom was he seeking.

"I am looking for my brothers, sir," answered Joseph. "Have you seen them? They have my father's flocks in their charge and ought to have been in this place."

"The herdsmen were here," said the stranger, "and went away. I heard one of them saying something about: 'Let us go to Dothan.' No doubt, it is there they have gone

with their droves. You'll find it about ten miles further on."

Thanking him, Joseph, tired as he was, (for he had come nearly sixty or seventy miles), went instantly to the named place, where, indeed, were those he sought.

They were all keensighted, and the air was so clear that they saw him when he was far beyond ear-shot and easily distinguished him by his gay-hued garment.

"It is Joseph coming," said one.

"Yes, as the Lord liveth, here is the dreamer!" sneered another.

"How long are we going to let him go his way, boasting over us men, brothers. Here's a chance for us," said Levi in hate.

"Yes, now is the time," said Simeon, "let's catch him and kill him. We can throw him into some cave, some dried up well or a crevice in the ground, and when we are asked about him at home, it will be easy to say: some wild beast or other must have eaten him."

"And then we'll see," said Levi, sneering again, "what will become of his dreams."

As soon, then, as Joseph came unsuspectingly up to them, a smile of pleasure at having found them covering his face, they all sprang on him, wrenched away his stick and might have robbed him of life then and there, only Reuben struck off the fierce hands and freed Joseph from them.

"No Judah, no, Levi, Simeon and Dan, no, all of you; what shall we gain by killing him outright? Don't let us do that—we want none of our hands stained with his blood—he's our father's child always, whatever he may have done. Here's a pit here, deep enough for it to be impossible for anybody, once in, to scramble out of it; let us throw him down into it. And there he will die, and none of us can be said to have laid hand on him."



Reuben was kind-hearted and cool-headed from his years, and he thought he would have a chance to pull up Joseph from the hole in the earth as soon as the others should be gone. All agreed to this new plan ; as if the crime of letting a man die by starvation and thirst was less than the actual slaying him. And after stripping him of the envied coat of many colors for a purpose, they dropped him into the deep well-hole, the bottom of which was dried up. On seeing this done, unable to bear Joseph's appeals and reproaches, Reuben made excuses that he must tend his division of the animals, and hurried off to them in a distant part of the plain. The rest, hardened in heart, turned a deaf ear to the voice from the well, and sat down by it under the trees, which grew taller here from its being the receptacle of the waters of the vales, to eat their bread and cold meat.

While eating, all of a sudden, the gentle breeze stealing over the plain and playing with leaves of the tree-tops over their heads, brought a perfume which was sweeter than the scent it always bore of wild flowers and grass. They descried in the distance a whole train of camels, bearing strapped on their sides bales of goods. It was a party of Midianite merchants who were bringing myrrh, balm, spices, and gums out of the Land of Gilead, for the trade of Egypt. The caravan came towards the well, thinking to find water there, especially as they saw the men taking their meal under the trees. As they approached, Judah said :

" Brothers, it is little we gain by having our brother die and spilling his blood, to cry out against us some day. He is our father's child, as Reuben said, whatever presumption and disrespect he may have had for us, his elders. Let us sell him to those traders coming hither."

All agreed, and they let down a wild vine and harled



Joseph out of the hole. As soon as the party came up, and the usual inquiries as to the weather, the state of water, the news as to robbers, had been exchanged, the sons of Israel proposed the sale of Joseph, who was bought by the merchants at last for twenty pieces of silver. And so, surrounded by strangers, the youth was carried away to remote Egypt, his back to his father and brothers. At the departure of the flocks, for home, Reuben hurried back to the pit to release his brother, but, of course, he could not see him. In grief, he hastened to his companions, tearing his clothes and mourning.

"The child is no more!" he cried. "Where shall I go, wretch that I am? Why did I, old enough not only to have known better, but to have done better, why did I let you do such an evil act."

On the way, they killed a poor little kid, dipped the coat in the blood, and sent some of the herdsmen on before with it to tell the lie that they had found it, and were not sure but that it was Joseph's.

Old Israel knew it only too well, and, at sight of it, sobbed out: "It is, it is my dear boy's. Some evil beast has eaten him. Joseph is torn to pieces."

In spite of all his family could do, the old man mourned for the lost youth many and many a day, and would not be comforted. While his father was thus shedding tears out of his aged eyes for him, the traders had brought Joseph into Egypt, where they sold him to a captain in the guards of King Pharaoh, of the name of Potiphar. He was first a servant.

Instead of uselessly sorrowing, Joseph, though his heart was far away in Canaan, applied all his mind and strength to doing his duty in his new life. The only time, indeed, that he did not work for his master was that given to sleep, and to that other and far, far greater Master, the Lord of

his life, who had preserved him, and who now heard his prayers. By his diligence and his attention, therefore, the young servant came to be much liked by his master, and gradually advancing in station as well as in esteem, he was presently made steward of the whole household, and next to the owner over all things, living and inanimate, about the family. For the sake of Joseph, heaven was kind to his master, and every matter concerning the good and welfare of the captain, was attended by success: on the officer's house and ground the sun seemed to shine more brightly and yet more kindly. Joseph could never thank heaven sufficiently for blessing him, and he prayed constantly that God would be good as well to those who deserved His kindness more than he: his old father, his sisters and brothers, far, far away, perhaps grieving over him buried alive in the foreign land.

In the Egyptian's house, Joseph grew up till he was a man, finely formed and handsome. The captain's wife one day tried to induce him to do wrong, but Joseph would not listen to her temptations, except to respectfully show her what a depth of guilt would be in his wronging the master who showed him so much favor. But she was too evil to be easily repulsed, and day after day, time and again, she persecuted the servant with her entreaties and threats. But, always, he was sustained by God, and he assured her that her earnestness was in vain; he would never stain his honor, disgrace his name, or do evil against his master, though none should see the crime save the All-seer. Angered against him, the shameful woman laid a plot against him, and, as her word was believed in much rather than a slave's, the husband was also enraged. By power of his station among Pharaoh's officers, he had the Hebrew thrown into the prison for the prisoners of the King.

Still again, Joseph's Friend remembered him, and in His

loving mercy, made the keeper of the prison-house show him favor. When things thus wore the worst look, the accused was helped and his load lightened. Faithful here as when free, he so well conducted himself, that the warden let him have charge of the jail, and scarcely gave any attention to it himself. Joseph had the keys, he visited the cells' gave out the food, saw to the desperate, the mourning and the sick. Here again, had he much to thank heaven for, and that he did so, is to be believed.

During this while, one day, King Pharoah, whose dainty palate had been offended by the bread and meats served up being burnt and ill-cooked, flew into a passion, and had the chief baker and chief butler thrown into the prison, where Joseph was keeping the keys. As they were important prisoners, and as the king had ordered them to be particularly guarded, the keeper made Joseph attend to them more than to the others of lesser note. They were there for some time, served by him.

One night, it happened that both the butler and the baker had a dream, which so affected both of them, that when Joseph opened their cell in the morning, he found them sad and anxious, so much so that he asked them what it was ailed them.

"It is a simple reason. We Egyptians believe that dreams are sent by our gods to give warning of griefs or promise of joys to their worshippers. We have each had a vision during the night, and, locked up here, how can we ask the priests of Isis and Osiris to explain them?"

"I am a Hebrew," said Joseph, "we believe in dreams, too, though only one God is all that we recognize. But tell me what you saw when sleep was on your eyes. Even I may be aided by heaven to relieve your troubled hearts."

And, before they could eat their breakfasts, with their new anxiety, they opened themselves to the turnkey. The chief butler first, in this wise :

"I was asleep. I thought I was looking at a grapevine before me, that divided into three boughs. While I gazed, it leaved, budded and blossomed, and the grapes not only formed but ripened in rich clusters. Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I picked the grapes and squeezed the juice into the cup, which I gave to the king's hands."

"The meaning of your dream," said Joseph, "was this: the three branches that the vine split into are so many days, by which time King Pharaoh shall relent and not only pardon you but make you his cup-bearer just the same as ever. Now, sir, think of me when what I tell you shall come to pass, be kind to me, I pray you, and beg Pharaoh to release me, too, from this prison house. You may ask the favour all the more easily because I am a man stolen when young from my country and under bar and bolt now without having done wrong."

When the chief baker saw how pleased his companion in captivity was at this happy promise in his dream, he was eager to have his unraveled and he told his to Joseph.

"In my dream, I had three white baskets woven of blanched Nile reeds on my head. In the top one was all kinds of baked meats for the royal table, but the birds flew around me and ate them all up out of the basket."

"That means," said Joseph, "that you are doomed. The three baskets were so many days, on the last of which your royal master shall have you dragged from here to be hanged on a tree, where the birds of the air shall flock around to eat your flesh from your bones."

Joseph spoke only too true, for, on the third day from that, which was Pharaoh's birth-day, when all was banquetting and merry making, the ruler sent to have the butler restored to his former station, for he found he had wronged him, and the man did become his cup-bearer once again; but as for the cook, he was hanged, as Joseph had told him

his dream had forewarned. In spite of his renewal of favor (or, perhaps, on that very account, for it is often easier to forget benefits than evil done one), the butler did not have a second thought of Joseph, still in prison.

Two whole years went over the heads of all from the king on his throne to the poor drawer of water on the rivers. Joseph was patiently enduring his unchanged life. At the end of that time, Pharaoh was troubled with two dreams in succession which highly impressed him.

The first was that he fancied himself on the banks of a river, out of whose waters came seven cattle, which began to feed on the meadows by the water-side. Presently, as many cattle, but lean, hungry-looking ones, came from the stream also and ate up the seven fat ones, yet were no better looking than before. Pharaoh awoke, but on falling asleep once more, he dreamed again: on one stalk, seven ears of corn grew out, rich, and large; they were still flourishing, when seven thin, mildewed, bug-eaten, smutted ears sprang out also and absorbed the seven good ones, and still they were thin and wasted.

In the morning after this, the monarch was very uneasy, and he could not rest until he had sent for all the learned men and magicians in Egypt, of whom he demanded a clearing up of his dream. But that was something none of them could do. While they were all in doubt, the chief butler said to his master: "O king, I remember how one day, two twelvemonths since, I was faulty towards your majesty. King Pharaoh was wroth against me and had me shut up with the chief cook, in the prison house of the captain of the guards. The baker and I both had a dream, and, happening to tell it to a young Hebrew captive who was there, this foreigner told us what our visions were fore-runners of. And sure enough, what he foretold, did come to pass: the baker was punished; I, thanks to your majesty's justice,



was restored to my place on your birthday, of which be there many and many !”

Still uneasy about his dreams, the king instantly sent for the imprisoned interpreter. Joseph was released, hastily given a dress, and, as soon as he had cared for himself so as to appear becomingly, he was led in to the royal presence in the throne-room, rich with carvings of man-bulls and winged lions, and stained pillars :

“I have dreamed a double dream,” said the king ; “there are none who can disclose its secret to me. I have been told that you can interpret such things : is that true ?”

“That is something not at my command,” answered Joseph. “My God is alone the Perfection of Wisdom. I can only say ; may He make me a messenger of good words to your majesty.”

The king repeated his dreams, and added : “If you can unfold these, you are wiser than any and all the magicians and wise men throughout my realm, and my kingdom encloses the most learned of all nations.”

Joseph stood for a moment silent. All was hushed around except the faint breathing, the low sound of the steps of the guards in the corridors, and the rustle of Pharaoh’s robe as he leaned forward on his elbow to hear. Joseph looked out of the window, deep in the thick wall, not on the temple of the heathen gods, no, his glance rose from the winged globes and strange figures of the stranger birds and beasts of that mysterious land, to the sky, brilliant with the ever bright star of day. When he brought his gaze back again, it was calm with a mighty knowledge and an immense joy that he, so humble, should have been chosen by the king of kings as a mouth-piece.

“The dreams of Pharaoh are one. The Great Power who gave life to all things and can take it away, permits King Pharaoh this glimpse into the time to come ; there will be

seven years of great, great plenty in the land of Egypt, from the stars one side to the ones on the other, from the left to the right hand. But, after them, there shall come seven years of famine, which shall so lay waste the earth that its former fruitfulness shall be driven out of mind. The dream was twice sent to Pharaoh, so that he might be fully convinced and not say: 'Ah! it was only a sport of my mind.' The fourteen years thus halved between plenty and want are surely to be sent by God. Let Pharaoh choose some wise man to rule the land of Egypt, appoint officers and put away in safety the product of a fifth part of the realm, and store up grain in all the strong cities against the seven bad years. Else, the people will die off the face of the country."

Not only did this speech seem sensible in Pharaoh's eyes, but also in those of the rest, and they bowed approval, when the sovereign said:

"As God shows you so much, it must be because there are none so wise as you. For this, you shall be great as myself throughout my domains, excepting on the throne. Let all know that this man is set over all the kingdom of Egypt!"

Pharaoh put his own signet ring, as token of authority on Joseph's hand, ordered fine clothes to be given him and presented him with a heavy chain of gold. Whenever the royal train went out of the palace, hunting, traveling, visiting this or that great noble, Joseph rode in the chariot that came next to the royal one, and he had guards given him who cleared a way before him wherever he went, and ushers who cried, with trumpettings: "Bow the knees!" Thus was the poor shepherd boy of Canaan, by trust in God, patience, diligence, obedience to his elders and superiors in every hour of his life, elevated to the honored position of ruler over the great, populous land of Egypt. He

who had borne his brothers' persecutions so long was now the second in the kingdom. In a little over twelve years, the Father he confided in (and who took the place of the one not seen or heard of for so long) had granted him the almost miracle.

Joseph traveled all over the country which was yielding in great abundance, and saw that the harvest was garnered in the strong cities, where the shelter of the huge warehouses would prevent the hurt it would be exposed to in the open fields. The corn was so richly plenty, that it was impossible to measure it, and they had to be glad to have it without reckoning its quantity. Meanwhile, as Joseph was growing wealthy in power and substance, he was blessed besides with two children, for he had been given in marriage the daughter of the high priest of On. The first (boy like the other) he named Manasseh, meaning: "God hath made me forget my toil and my distant home." The other was named Ephraim.

At last, the seven years of abundance came to a close, and the dreaded season began, as God had announced by Joseph. The dearth was every where. Growing things ceased to grow or, if grown never blossomed or came to seed, and the insects, that people might have lived on, died away like bird and beast, for lack of food. In Egypt alone, there was bread, for when his subjects began to complain in fear of starvation, King Pharaoh sent them to Joseph. He opened the granaries, and sold to the people. The other districts, not under Pharaoh's rule, began to hear of his subjects living out of fear of starvation, and they flocked into his realm to buy also.

Thus Joseph, in return for his corn, received all the money not only belonging to the Egyptians themselves but to the people around that country. The money was given



to the king. Then, after the consumers were penniless, they came again to Joseph and asked for bread.

"They had no money, but could he see them die under his very eyes, when his granaries were solid to the ground with weight of wheat.

"You have cattle," answered Joseph. "Shall our lord the king go unrewarded for his care to this people? If you have no money, bring your cattle."

And the pasturages, yards and houses of the government began to be crowded with horses, flocks of sheep, herds of cattle, asses, and, in exchange for them, Joseph gave out the material for bread which lasted them that year. Again hunger appeared, and the people came begging to eat.

"Our money, like our cattle, is gone, my lord. Ourselves and our lands alone are left to us. But what use will be land, if we perish? We will sell our lands and our bodies for food. We will be servants to Pharaoh, before famine shall destroy us."

In return for the provisions, then, Joseph took all the ground of the fields of both rich men and poor in the name of the king. He made the inhabitants leave one part of Egypt to be collected at another, and, in planting the seeds he gave them, reserve a fifth part of the yield for the sovereign.

During this time, the famine had greatly afflicted men far off, and near to Egypt, and Israel himself had his crops scanty and spoiled. But, on hearing the news, which traveled slowly then, of the Egyptians being happy in sustenance, he turned to his murmuring sons and ordered them to get all ready, except young Benjamin so beloved by the aged man, and go down to Egypt to buy corn. The ten brothers made the journey in safety and came before Joseph. As they bowed themselves to so mighty a man as he, he recog-

nised them, but they, very naturally, did not see in the youth drawn out of the well-hole to be sold for a few coins the dreaded second ruler in the realm. Joseph roughened his voice in addressing them, while thinking how his visions of boyhood of his brothers bowing down to him were now realised, and asked them by an interpreter, for he pretended ignorance of the Hebrew tongue :

" Well, where are all you from ?"

" The land of Canaan. We are come to buy food."

" You utter untruth. You are spies, and wish to see if we are starving here. But, look ! we have enough to live on, and our men of war are not wasted away, and can stoutly use the spear, bow and sling, which at least, the famine cannot hurt. You are spies, but you cannot see suffering in our land."

" No, no, my lord, we your servants, are simply come to buy food. We are sons of one man who lives in Canaan now. We are twelve brethren, but the youngest stays at home with father, and one is dead, we believe."

" Very well. Your own story shall prove your truth. By the life of Pharaoh the great king, you shall stay here in durance until I see this youngest brother of yours. I will have you kept in prison till one of you can go and bring back this brother and show you are true men. Otherwise you are spies and you shall suffer the fate you deserve."

For three days, they were all shut up ; at the end of which time, they were brought before Joseph, who said :

" There may be truth in your tale, and if so, I am one who fear the Universal Ruler too greatly to be cruelly harsh to you. Let one only of you remain as hostage, while the rest of you take away what corn you buy, for your family should not die. But, remember, bring back your youngest brother to me, that done, will prove the truth of your story, and no harm shall befall you."

"This misfortune has come upon us," said they one to another; "as a judgment for our having been so guilty to our brother Joseph. We would not hear him when he appealed—we are not listened to, now in our distress."

"Did I not say," answered Reuben, "'Do the child no harm?'" You would not hear me, then. Now, his blood is on our heads."

They did not know that Joseph, who overheard them, could understand what they said. But he did, and he could not help going into an inner room and weeping, and returned to them. He ordered Simeon to be taken from them and bound with cords in their very sight. Their sacks were filled with corn, by his commands, and, besides putting their money in them, they were given provisions for the way. They reached home, told their father the story, and were all surprised to find their bags of money in their several sacks. They were afraid as well as surprised.

"What is it God has done for us?" exclaimed they.

"What is it God has done to me?" sorrowed Israel, forgetting himself to blame the Great Power, who was at the very moment so kind to him. "My children are being torn from me. First, Joseph goes to death. Now Simeon is in evil hands, and here you try to take Benjamin from me. Everything is against me."

But Reuben spoke out:

"Father, I have two sons. You can slay them if—after you shall have trusted Benjamin to me—I do not bring him back to you."

But the old man was not to be persuaded.

"Two are gone. I will not add another to their number. He shall not go down into the land of Pharaoh with you. His brother Joseph is dead and has left him alone. If any misfortune befall him on your way, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

At last, the corn that had been purchased, was all used up, and famine once more stared them in the face.

"Our food is nearly all consumed," said Israel. "You will have to go again into Egypt and procure more."

"But," said Judah, "that great man among the Egyptians said he would not let us come near him unless our brother was with us. Let Benjamin come, and we will do what you say. But unless you do, I, for one, am not going to enter the lion's den."

"Would you rather enter the den with a tender lamb to give the fierce beast?" asked the old man. "Oh, why did you say anything about your brother?"

"Why? Because the governor asked particularly as to our father and family. We answered him as we should. How could we think he would say what he did, and make Simeon a hostage?"

"Let the boy come with us," said Judah, "it's but a ride for him. We will be off at once there. I will answer to you for all. Let him come, or we—you and ourselves and families—will die assuredly. Let him come, father. We would have been back already, only for your delaying."

Israel sighed.

"If it *must* be, let it be so. But do this as well. Carry down a present to that governor; some of your best fruits, some balm, spices, honey and almonds. They do not have these things in Egypt, and they may be accounted a welcome gift. And take double money this time, and the money that we found tied up in the corn, it must have been by some mistake. Ah! well, take Benjamin, and go. May the Almighty God be merciful and make merciful this governor, so that he may send away your brother Simeon and Benjamin. If my children shall be taken away, God help me."

They saddled their asses and camels, put on their gifts,

divided the money among them for safer and easier carriage, and started on their second journey, ten again, with Benjamin among them. They arrived in safety at the house where Joseph as governor distributed the food. When Joseph saw them, and Benjamin among them, he went away and ordered the steward of his palace to bring the brothers to his residence, and make all ready for a dinner which he would have with them at noon. The Hebrews were conducted to the place, where they were too much terrified to wonder at the massive walls of hewn sandstone, the gigantic carvings of animals, and the ornaments of strange leaves and plants.

"This is the governor's house," whispered Reuben, "we are in danger. The money was returned to us so as to make it a pretext to accuse us of theft, and not only rob us of our beasts of burden but make us bondsmen also."

To prevent this, they hastened to speak to the steward and tell him how they had been astounded to find their pay returned to them.

"Peace be to you, have no fear," said the man; "we had your money."

Simeon was released and brought out to his brothers, who were shown every attention; their feet, on which the burning sand had fallen in their journey, were washed in cold water, and the animals of their train were fed. They heard that the governor meant to come home to dine, and against his appearance, they prepared their presents. And when Joseph did, indeed, enter, they hastened to offer him what they had brought, bowing down as low as the ground. He asked them of their health, and went on to inquire:

"Is your father, the old man of whom you spoke, still alive and well?"

"Our father, your lordship's servant, is alive and in good health."



And, as they bowed again, they did not notice his inward joy at the grateful news.

"This, then, is your younger brother, I suppose, of whom you were telling me?" he said, pointing to Benjamin.

"Yes, my lord."

"God be good to you, my sons!" said Joseph, making haste to enter his room, where he wept long and plentifully, for he loved so dearly despite all. As soon as he had washed his face, and bathed his eyes to remove the redness, he went out, master again of his emotions, and bid the servants serve up the meal. He sat at a higher part of the table than the others, eating apart. The Egyptians too, did not break bread with the Hebrews, for they did not eat with men like them who lived on the flesh of cattle, which they held holy and worshipped. The brothers sat in order, Reuben first and Benjamin last, all wondering as they dined, for the magnificence of Joseph's house, the number of servants, and the richness of the fare, took by surprise men accustomed to simple bread and fruit taken in the open air. And they were greatly amazed besides, when Joseph sent them dishes from his own table and sent Benjamin five times as many dainties as to the others.

Joseph called his steward to him and commanded him to fill the men's sacks with food till they could hold no more, except their bags of money, which should be put in the mouths; and to put his silver cup, on which he set great store, in the mouth of the youngest man's sack with his money.

The brothers had a plentiful supper served them and soft beds to lie on that night. As soon as it was dawn, they took advantage of the morning's coolness to start with their asses. But Joseph was on the watch, and had arranged all his plans. As soon as the party were out of the city, but not gone very far on their homeward way rejoicing, Joseph

called his steward and told him to take some soldiers and hasten after the Hebrews. Collecting a score of the guards the chief man of Joseph's household made haste and overtook the brothers, who were seized by the armed men.

"What do you lay hands on us for?" cried Judah, struggling fiercely with his staff against the Egyptians' spears, but mastered at last.

"What have we done, good sirs?" asked Reuben; "to be stopped on the road after your lord has feasted us and let us go in gladness and with thanks.

"You repaid his goodness with evil," answered the steward. "You have robbed my master."

"No! no!" said they all. "We brought back the money that went in our bags to Canaan! Does that seem an action of men who would steal from their benefactor's house, whose roof kindly sheltered them?"

"The rich silver cup, by which my master sees into the future, is missing. You have done evil in taking it."

The brothers held up their hands to heaven.

"If we have aught of your master's goods, except that came honestly," answered they, "we are willing to be punished for it. If you find the silver vessel on one of us, let him die, and we will be your lord's bondsmen also."

"Agreed," said the steward, "let it be according to your own words. Whoever has the stolen cup shall give his life to my master, and you shall be blameless."

So, they unloaded the asses after they had found nothing on the men, and began to open their sacks and feel in them for the object. It was the eldest that they began on, and the prisoners' faces brightened as the eighth, the ninth and the tenth had been examined and nothing of the cup seen, though there was in every sack the money they had paid. But the last, Benjamin's, was scarcely untied, than some-

thing glittered in amongst the yellow grain,—it was the cup.

They loaded the asses quickly, and, with their captives mourning, blaming Benjamin for having done the theft, and wondering that their price should have been returned anew, they turned back to the city. Joseph was still in his house. When led before him, they fell upon their faces on the stone slabs.

“What have you done?” reproached Joseph. “Do you think I am named vainly the Revealer of Secrets, (for this was the Egyptian name given to him by King Pharaoh, when he explained the dreams.) Can you do anything and I not know it?”

“What shall we say to your lordship? what? what? how can we clear ourselves? God has punished us all for one’s wickedness, (and for our sin of old,” said Judah to himself.) “We are your lordship’s servants, we and he whose sack contained the cup.”

“It would be wrong to do that, very unjust,” said Joseph. “It is enough that the one in whose sack they found the cup, shall be my servant. The rest of you can go unrestrained to your home.”

The brothers looked at one another, and the same scene was before their eyes: an old, old man, his head in his hands, his breast in the dust, his long silver beard torn and dust-stained, and tears running from his worn eyes. Reuben turned away his face, Naphtali sobbed, the other’s faces showed what they felt, but none but Judah had the courage to address the governor.

“Oh, my lord,” said he, “let me, your servant, speak one word in your ears. Let not your anger burn against a poor herdsman, when you are mighty as Pharaoh’s self. You asked us your servants, my lord, if we had a father or brother, and we answered: ‘My lord, we have an old



father and a little child of his old age. The boy's brother is dead like his mother, of whom he is all that is left for father to love.' You bade us go bring him down here to be seen by you, and we answered: 'The youth cannot leave his father, for if they are parted, the old man will die. But you swore we should never more find you favorable to us, unless we should let you see our brother, and we told our father this. He wanted us to go again to buy what would keep us alive, but we refused except he let our youngest brother go with us. And oh, sir, when we said this, father moaned: 'One of my dear wife's two sons went out of the house and has never been seen again by me—if the other is also lost, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.' So, if we go home and do not have the boy with us, he will die, and we, your servants, will bring down his gray hairs in sorrow to the grave! I was surety for him, and on me all the blame and grief will fall. I pray you, my lord governor, to have me stay instead of the boy, and let him go home with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father without the youth? I would then see the death of my father.'"

Joseph could play his part no longer at this touching speech, and in a broken voice, he ordered everybody out of the room. As soon as he was alone with his brothers, he burst into tears, and wept so loudly that he was heard beyond the door.

"I am Joseph!" said he, sobbing.

They were amazed and greatly disturbed by his making himself known.

"Come here to me, come."

They approached him reluctant with the remembrance of their treatment of him.

"I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold to be taken into Egypt. Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves

for having done so. It was God who sent me thither to preserve life. Two years of famine have passed over the land, but there are yet five years, in which there can be no harvest. God chose me to save your lives as well by a great deliverance. He made me a father to Pharaoh in counselling him, and lord over all his house and the kingdom."

They could still hardly believe their sight and their ears.

"Your eyes see, so do Benjamin's, that it is the mouth of your brother Joseph that speaks."

And, unable to contain himself longer, Joseph fell upon Benjamin's neck and the two wept in gladness together. And he kissed all his brethren, with tears of forgiveness. After that, they told each his story, and thus they learned one another's lives.

"Now, make haste back to our father, and say, his own son Joseph is living. God has made him lord of all Egypt. He asked him to come into Egypt with all of you and yours, with your flocks and herds, where you shall dwell in the Land of Goshen and be cared for by me, lest you and yours come to want, for there are yet five years to come of famine. Tell father of all my glory and of all you have seen; and you shall hasten your return to me with him."

The news of the meeting had reached Pharaoh's ears, and it pleased him as it had done Joseph's other friends. The king came to say to his right-hand man: "When your brothers are home, let them tell their father that the King of Egypt, for the sake of the son of his who has done so much with such faithfulness to his monarch, promises him the best in his realm."

Joseph gave his brothers carts for the carriage of their goods on their return, provision for their journey, ten asses laden with Egyptian luxuries and ten more laden with corn, bread and meat for Israel, and to each man fine clothes and

to Benjamin three hundred pieces of silver and fine dresses. With their long train now, they arrived in Canaan. But, when they told their father of the greatness of God's kindness and bounty to those who walk in His ways as shown to Joseph, the aged man all but fainted at the surprise of his lost son being alive and governor of Egypt, and he would not believe till he had seen the carts Pharaoh had ordered Joseph to give his brothers, which were of a better make than the rude ones the men of the country had in use.

"Enough. Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I go to the God, whom, in my weakness and sin, I repined against, but who has proved Himself to be always too good to man."

And the old man hurried the departure of his family, and, to the number of sixty-six, they left Canaan for the new home. Judah was the guide and he led the way into Goshen. Joseph had word of the coming and he mounted his chariot and was driven to meet Israel his father. When they did come together, he hastened to fall upon the neck of the old man, who had mourned over him as dead these fifteen years, and wept on his bosom a long, long while. For, at last, God had blessed his humble follower as his faithfulness, truth, wisdom and gratitude deserved.

Joseph brought five of his brothers to Pharaoh, having previously instructed them how to answer the king, and, on the latter's learning that they were shepherds (who were not liked by the Egyptians from their having to do with cattle, whose images they worshipped, as has been said), he gave them the district of Goshen, and asked Joseph to select some of his father's family skilled in such matters to oversee his cattle. Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh whom the old man of a hundred and thirty years blessed.

To the Hebrews were given the Land of Kamesis, or Goshen, as Pharaoh had promised, and there they were nourished with bread from Joseph. At length, the famine passed, and the Hebrews increased in numbers, wealth and happiness for seventeen years, when Israel felt his time was come to die, and he called for Joseph. He made him take the vow to have his body buried among those of his forefathers out of Egypt. And, as the patriarch's eyes grew dim, Joseph brought his two sons to his bedside, where the old man kissed them.

"How good God is!" said he, "how good! I never believed I would see you, my son, again, but I not only see you, but your children, too. May the Angel which redeemed you from all evil, bless your boys, who will share in the blessings the God of Israel has promised our house. Let their names be changed to Isaac and Abraham, my fathers. Dear son Joseph, I die, but God, who is for everlasting, will be with you and yours."

Then he called the others around him and blessed them all, but to Joseph he said:

"You are a fruitful tree by the well, which has been hated and grieved, wounded and bent, but the dews and sun of heaven have blessed you and you have risen. The God of your father shall bless you and be bountiful to him who was separated from his brethren."

When Israel had ended the farewell to his sons, he died, Joseph kissing his cold face and raining hot tears upon him. Years and distance had not estranged him, and the honored governor in the prime of life was ever the loving son. According to the custom in Egypt, the body was embalmed; that is wrapped about with cloths oiled and spiced which keep it from decay. For seventy days the Egyptians mourned over the father of the saviour of their land. When the days of sorrowing were over, Joseph told

Pharaoh of his vow to his father to bury him with his ancestors, and he was not only cheerfully given the permission, but the king's household and all the men in Egypt eminent for wisdom and station joined with Israel's family to form a great procession of horses, camels, chariots and carts. It was in Canaan, beyond the river Jordan that Joseph held a mourning for seven days, before they buried the body in the desired place. As they returned to Egypt, the brothers of Joseph became afraid that he, now that their father was dead, would revenge himself for what they had done to him when he was powerless.

They hastened to send a messenger to him to tell him that their father had wished him to show them forgiveness for their evil design upon him, and they followed after to bow themselves to him.

But he raised them and bade them have no fear.

"You meant evil against me, true; but God meant good, and I have been the instrument in saving many lives. Do not fear. Be happy and rear your little ones."

Joseph continued faithfully to assist and encourage his brothers and their numerous offspring.

In the midst of all the temptings of ambition and the allurements of pleasure, Joseph remained true to the godly precepts inculcated by the venerable patriarch, Jacob, his worthy father. Indeed, doubtless, in his boyhood the aged Israel had often described to his wondering and attentive child the glorious vision that had flashed upon him, when his head reposed upon the stone pillow, what time he saw the angel of the Lord, ascending and descending from the open gates of heaven, and heard the Great voice foretell the future prosperity and glory of his children and his children's children. These communings must have fallen like good seed into the heart of the young shepperd, and ripened into a golden harvest when in after years he governed

the mighty people who in those days quenched their thirst with the waters of the Nile.

Joseph lived long to witness the benefits he had conferred both on his own family and on the people of his adoption, and sank to rest amid the lamentations of those whom he had saved from destruction.



*MOSES.*

For the salvation of Egypt, his kingdom, Pharaoh was grateful to Joseph the Hebrew, and, while he reigned and there lived those people who had been spared from the famine by the once shepherd boy's care (under God), all went well with the relations of Joseph who had come and settled in the land of Egypt. But the time arrived, when a new monarch sat upon the throne, and he was not at all pleased at the foreigners being so blessed as they were. He was afraid, too, that they would ere long become so numerous and powerful that they would be a thorn in his side. They might at any moment join themselves to the enemies of Egypt and overthrow the sovereign in their own favor.

So he thought to alter their happy lives, and, appointing overseers over them after dividing them into bands, they were made to do hard work for him, such as making roads, drawing water, and building cities. But heaven still blessed the people, and it seemed as if the more they were oppressed the more rapidly they increased. This only sharpened the Pharaoh's anger, and he lengthened the hours of labor and the hardness of their tasks. Very toilsome it was for the Hebrews, to labor at moulding bricks to be dried in the sun, at moving massive blocks of stone to great distances, at tilling the ground, at bearing great bur-

dens, at doing the acts beasts were usually employed for.

But all this did the poor drudges no harm as far as their number went, and only goaded the king on to greater severity, until at length, he ordered that every boy born to the Hebrews should be flung into the Nile, there to meet cruel death by the exposure, the cold wind and crocodiles, in their helplessness and innocence.

There was one mother of the tribe of Levi, who had hidden her little son for three months from the searches of the royal officers, for she could not bear—whatever might be her punishment—to be robbed of the pretty little thing beginning to smile his thanks for her cares and loves. But at last, she could not help seeing that further concealment would only bring harm upon herself and on the little one as well. So she plaited of rushes a basket that would float like a boat, put pitch on the seams to keep the water out, filled it inside with soft leaves and cloth, laid the baby in it well wrapped up and went down to the Nile. She had thought at first to push the frail vessel out into the stream, but her heart failed her, and she had only the strength to go off, her eyes all the time on it, leaving it among the tall reeds. Then, weeping, she went home; for, to have the child so near her, and she having to abandon it, was a torture she could not bear. She could only mourn and trust the outcast to heaven.

Her daughter, though, lingered near the spot to see what accident might befall the boat. As the shades of evening came on, a clank of metal reached her ears, and she hurried to hide herself among the bulrushes, for they were soldiers who approached; men of the royal guard who explored the bank to make sure no men were near. They saw only the Hebrew woman. As soon as their captain had rendered his report that the shore was clear, he and his men went away to give place to a number of richly dressed wo-



men, tinkling with heavy ear-rings, bracelets and rings round their ancles, and brilliant with brightly dyed mantles and jeweled headdresses : it was Pharaoh's daughter, with her maids coming to bathe in the river.

She was unfolding her robes when a piteous wail came to her ears. She knew it could not be any of the birds fishing along the shores, nor fish in the river, and, her curiosity awakened, she went to the place. The babe had opened his eyes and was crying in her face, while his tiny hands seemed to beg her to help him. She had compassion on him, and she knelt on the rushes she had bent down, to see him better. She knew at once that it was a Hebrew child, but she imagined that it was some poor mother's who had set it adrift in the ark and it had been runaground here before the breeze. As she spoke her thought, the babe's sister came from her covert and said to the princess :

"Shall I find some woman of the Hebrews to care for this innocent who has attracted your Highness's pity?"

"Yes. Haste."

The girl had not far to run to bring back the mother of the boy, whom the princess ordered to take him away and nurse it for her, for pay, and she would see no harm should come to her, for evading the law. So wonderfully by providential aid, the mother was not deprived of her joy until he was of fair age, when Pharaoh's daughter demanded him. She gave the name of Moses to him, for that means: Taken from the running water. In the palace, a page and attendant with other youths, Moses grew to manhood, but he always preserved a love for his race.

One day, he was out in the fields, when the laborers were returning home, with the last loads for the night. He saw one poor Hebrew bending under a great bundle of wheat

and scarcely able to move, but an Egyptian was beating him and bidding him walk faster, faster. All Moses' blood rushed to his face, he hardly waited to look prudently right and left to be sure no witnesses were nigh, and struck down the tyrannical task-master. The blow, given with all the youth's strength and with all his indignation, was fatal. He hurriedly scooped out a hole in the sand and buried the body. But the rescued Hebrew told the story to all his brothers, while, soon after, the Egyptians found the corpse, which hyenas had unearthed. So they sought high and low for the slayer, who had fled—in fear of this—out of the kingdom into the Land of Midian, for Pharaoh had especially ordered his death, and he could find shelter nowhere within his domains.

Hungry, footsore and lonely, Moses wandered in the strange country. His life in the palace had unfitted him for any such calling as tender of cattle or as a farmer, and he barely could get a bit of bread here and there as a gift from some husbandman.

He was sitting by a well, having just quenched his thirst and bathed his face, sadly watching some flocks and their herdsmen, almost envying the latter for having some kind of a home to which to go, when half a dozen girls of different ages but having sufficient likeness to seven sisters, as they were, (being the seven daughters of Reuel, the high priest of Midian), came to the well, each driving her division of the great flock of their father. They were about to fill the large troughs by the well's mouth, made of halves of trees hollowed out, when the other shepherds ran up and would have driven all away, girls and sheep. But Moses, brandishing his walking-staff, forced the men to cease their rudeness, and helped the maids in the watering of the flocks.

In other days, the girls, unable to strive against the

shepherds, had often had to waste many hours in begging permission to draw water there and sometimes had to wait until the men had gone away to house their flocks. Hence Reuel was surprised to see his daughters returning with their sheep safe before it was dusk. They told him how a stranger, dressed like a man of Egypt, had stood their friend and been of so much assistance to them.

"What! and you never have invited him to break bread with us? your thanks must have been like pressed apples to the wayfarer. Send out and have him brought to the house."

They found Moses not far off and forced him to sup and spend the night there. He told what story he pleased of his life, and Reuel was happy to engage in his service a man who had already showed his courage and readiness to oblige. The young fugitive served him faithfully. His master became so content with him, indeed, that finally he gave him one of his daughters for wife.

Meanwhile, that king of Egypt died, but no lessening came to the toil of the descendants of Israel and their pain knew no alleviation. They prayed night and day, amid broken sleep and when under the yoke and whip.

God heard their groans and entreaties, and He listened—not only because He is always full of love, kindness and mercy—but because He had promised to watch over His chosen people, the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law in the desert by the Mountain of Horeb, when he suddenly saw a bush burst forth into flame, and yet not a bit of it, bark, leaf or twig, was consumed. Curious and astounded, he would have gone nearer, when a voice spoke from the burning bush, calling him by name and telling him he stood on holy ground, for the spirit of God was there. Moses fell on

his face in worship and in awe, for mortal eyes could not look on such glory. And God bade him do so and so.

But Moses was but a man and he lacked faith, asking :  
“What proof shall I give the people that I am the messenger?”

“What have you in your hand?”

“A rod that I lately plucked.”

“Cast it on the ground,”

The stick fell on the sandy rock, but, on its touching it, its bark changed into a shiny, scaly skin, its fine point into a tail, and its broken end into a head, from whose fanged jaws a long, forked tongue darted glistening. It was a snake that crawled at Moses’ feet, and he fled from it in alarm. But the voice bade him take it up, and—full of faith, now—he found the courage to stoop and to seize the reptile by the tail, when it became the rod again.

Two other proofs were granted to Moses, by which he might convince the Hebrews, but again he delayed.

“I am slow of speech, oh, Lord, and even now when thy glory is round about me.”

And God was vexed at Moses’ hesitation, and he said :

“You have an elder brother, Aaron ; he shall receive my words through you, and he shall speak to the people. Take your rod. Go you into Egypt, for all are dead who would revenge that Egyptian’s death on you.”

And, trembling, for such an office was weighty for one man, Moses hurried to his father-in-law, to obtain his leave to go into Egypt and see if the Hebrews his brothers were still living. He put his wife and children on an ass and set out, the rod made mighty by heaven, carefully enfolded in his bosom. On the way he was met by his brother Aaron, who had been warned by heaven, also, and to him Moses told all. They were eighty years of age at this time.

When in Egypt, therefore, Aaron rose before the people and spoke. And the doubters believed when the miracles were performed before them. They believed all the more readily because they had prayed so long, and so earnestly to be relieved of their afflictions by the Lord.

Moses and Aaron gained hearing and entrance to the royal presence, and, when before the new Pharaoh, Aaron said :

“ The Lord who is the God of Israel has spoken. You are besought by us, his servants, to be let go three days’ journey into the desert that we may hold a feast, and worship Him untroubled.”

The king laughed, and he glanced around on his magnificent palace and its riches.

“ Who is your Lord, who would have me, Pharaoh, obey His words? I know the chief of that tribe, the monarch of this nation, but I never heard of the Hebrews boasting in a sovereign of power. Do I let my subjects make bricks and build for another ruler’s glory? Would your Lord, if worthy of the name, let His servants be under my thrall. I know no Lord on all the earth to whom I bow. I will not let my laborers rob me of their work.”

“ We pray thee—we who know of our Lord’s might—to let us go and sacrifice to Him, if we do not, he may punish us with plagues or war.”

The king rose up from his chair of state, trembling with passion.

“ No, I have said. Moses, Aaron, I have been informed of your doings. You go talking to your people and so enchant them with your words on foolish stories about their dead and gone greybeards, that they grumble and toil as lazily as they dare. I am kind hearted, I have been so to you Hebrews more than my royal father (rest to his embalmed body in its pyramid you slaves have been honored



to erect!) but now—if you continue to spread uneasiness among them, you and they shall rue it.”

He waved the guards to put the Hebrew representatives from his throne room.

“Get you to your work!”

That same day the king summoned the overseers of the workingmen to come before him and he gave out orders that the Hebrews should be made to furnish the same quantity of bricks as formerly, yet should be compelled over and above that to find the straw (which was added to the mud to make the bricks more holding) themselves.

“You do not give them enough to do:” said the monarch angrily. “They are idle too much; go make them work as I bid you.”

Next day, therefore, when the Hebrews asked for the straw, they were told they were to find it themselves. They lost half the day in gathering stubble out of the mown fields, for good straw was not procurable, and, do their utmost, they could not hope to perform their usual quantity of work.

As there were too many of the Hebrews for them all to be punished on one occasion, the Egyptians had taken some from among them to answer for their fellows and these chosen men were either the old and revered or the young and loved, and on them this evening fell the punishment for their hands failing in executing an impossibility. In vain they appealed to their Egyptian superiors, and, when they went higher with their complaints and addressed Pharaoh, he spurned them and sent them back to their master.

“Lazy fellows! you have time enough to moan out; Let us go to sacrifice to our God. Have time enough to gather the straw. You must still produce as many bricks as before, in spite of all you say. Away!”

As these elders and leaders left the palace sorrowfully, laughed at by the guards, who pushed them down the great

steps of huge slabs laid on one another by their own Hebrew hands, doomed to harder portion, they met Moses and Aaron. Happy to vent their troubles on some who would have to listen, for none had dared to raise his voice in the great king's presence, under the sword as they were, they unchained the storm against them.

"May the Lord, who alone knows whether you are deceiving us or not, be the judge between us. We have acted as you counselled. We have followed what you say is the holy Word, and see! we are worse than ever in Pharaoh's sight, and he and his are eager to kill us in torment."

In vain did Moses assure them that a greater than Pharaoh's superiors, the King of Kings said to him that He would free them from Egyptian bondage, and make them happy yet in a blessed land. The people were in anguish, and they could not, in the depths of their misery, imagine the promised land. They turned a deaf ear to Moses and his brother, whose voices fell unheeded among them, either on woman, man or child.

Moses prayed from his heart to the Lord, and implored Him to continue the promised mercy, to prove that he was truthful in what he had reported to the people. God answered him again :

"The Hebrews disbelieve my words because you, whom I have chosen for an instrument, and not a holy angel, delivered them. I will perform such wonders as only the Almighty Creator and Keeper of this my earth could do. I will make not only the Hebrews see my power, but these idolators, their masters, shall also behold and feel it. I have said my people shall go from Egypt. They shall go."

Again then did Moses and Aaron go into the royal presence and ask the permission for the enslaved to go into the wilderness.



"If this God of yours you so much talk about, was one of power," answered Pharaoh, "it is time He displayed it. Show me that He has a right to send messengers like you to me. Do something that will show the might of Him you worship, whom you say is over all."

Aaron threw down the rod on the carpet at the foot of the steps of the throne, and, as it had done at Mount Horeb and before the Hebrews, it became a serpent, before whose hiss the guards fell back, and the king started in his seat. But he laughed his alarm away, and called the wise men, priests and magicians to him, and asked them to outdo that feat.

"Behold," said he, "what the untaught brickmakers perform. You are old with learning, do you the same."

And, indeed, they cunningly cast down on the floor what seemed to be sticks but were really serpents, stained and moulded at head and tail with painted clay to deceive the eye, and which, at the shock of the fall, (which broke their false covering, imitating wood,) sprang up in life. The messengers sent for them had told them what the Hebrews had done, and they had prepared themselves.

Pharaoh was yet speaking, commanding rewards to be given his magicians, while the serpent-rod of Aaron crept after the other snakes and devoured them all, without its own size in the least increasing.

But, though the soldiers and the sorcerers themselves shrank away and stood aghast, the king laughed, and would see nothing in the act but a very superior trick. He countermanded the recompenses of the wise men, advised them to apply themselves more closely to their books till they could surpass these slaves who excelled them now, and sent away Moses with his request unanswered.

A response from on high came to Moses, who had once

more been compelled to bear his brother's reproaches, and with it another direction as to the next step.

It was morning. The sun rose clear and shot its golden arrows upon the calm hill, reflecting the tall palm trees that gently nodded, the Hebrews going to the water works along the stream, a far-off bird skimming the gilded surface, and a fleet of gaily decorated boats, softly rocking on the low ripple that laved the stone steps of the embankment near the palace. King Pharaoh, with a numerous party, was going to take a pleasure excursion; all were laughing, and all was gaiety.

Leaning on the arm of his favorite, his hair perfumed, a band of precious stones encircling his brow, his robe heavy with gold thread, King Pharaoh, amid a shout from his guard came stately towards the royal barge. He was not at all pleased, at such a moment, in such a place, to see, stepping out from behind a block of stone, to whose ring the rope of the king's boat was fastened, Moses and Aaron, their sober garments, venerable air of solemnity, and their long grey beards, not at all becoming the scene.

"I will warrant," whispered he to his favorite, "that their first words are, 'Let my people go.' By Cain's head, they are endless as a serpent biting his own tail. Well what do you seek here, sirs?"

In his path at the edge of the water, the two confronted the monarch.

"Sire, we have come to you to beg. We have come to show our Lord can amaze. We have come to prove our Lord can punish. You have scorned our entreaty to be let go into the wilds to worship our God.—Behold!"

Aaron struck the Nile with the rod. The waters that had been golden yellow in the light, steel blue in the shadow, turned into blood-red where the sun struck, ghastly dark in the shade. It was blood that rolled about

the shores, it was blood that buoyed up the gay boats, it was blood that dashed spray to the king's sandaled feet. It was blood that overpowered sickeningly the myrrh and frankincense of the cushions of the boats and of the courtiers' clothes.

And everywhere, city and country, indoors and out, in jug of humble cottager as in the prince's vase, in the trough of cattle as in the lady's bath of marble, the pure, fresh, inodorous water turned into thick, foul blood. The birds and beasts flew and ran shudderingly away from their drinking places, and the poisoned fish came to the surface, their turned-up bellies gleaming whiter than snow on the ruddy sheet.

But the magicians appeared also to turn water into blood, and, though they had this power only on the water within their reach, and not all over the land like the Hebrews, still, Pharaoh would not let himself be affected by the act. With the stream foully rolling on at his feet, he was stubbornly resolved not to grant the three days to the Hebrews. For seven days, men were in agony with thirst, and fruitlessly digged the sand and bored the rock for the pure fluid.

Again the Lord sent Moses to the King, who had had no more pleasure sails on the river, but kept himself shut up in his palace, but as before the entreaty was laughed at.

On which Moses told Aaron to wave the rod over the waters; and where it was done, the Egyptians were seized with fresh fright. For out of the river, the rivulets, the ponds, the wells, leaped frog after frog, all sizes and colors, to such a number that to attempt to count them was foolish. They were active and vigorous and no place was safe from them, high or low. The people built fires in the gate-ways, but they pressed on the burning wood and by their moist bodies, put out the blast; they stood guard over their



But Moses, brandishing his walking-staff, forced the men to cease their rudeness, and helped the maidens in the watering of the flocks.—PAGE 39.





fields with clubs, stones, and flails and struck out manfully but for every reptile slain ten came on more vigorous than before. The men stood in the doors, but the frogs squeezed past them, leaped up in their faces and on them, or jumped through the windows or crept through the air. They spared no one or nothing. They sprang down cellars, and upset the provisions stored away, they scrambled up stairs and danced many deep on the straw of the chambers. They secreted themselves in clothes, in the beds, in the cooking vessels. They squatted in the ovens and tainted the bread by their burnt ashes. They swarmed on the couches and seats, and took flying leaps from head to head of the eaters, overthrowing the vases, jugs and dishes. They were as noisy as active, too, and the sharp cree-ek of the little ones and the hoarse gree-uk of the larger echoed all over the land instead of the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep and the chirping of birds.

The people sent their great men to the king, to beg him to save them from such a plague, and the frogs followed them, running under their feet, into the palace, where they met more of their sort, and into the throne-room, where more frogs played. Pharaoh could not but feel this evil, for he had no meal in quiet himself, and look where he might, there was nothing but the long-legged creatures slimily disporting themselves in sun and shade, bending down the grain and robbing the fruit-trees of leaves in their leaps. He summoned Moses and his brother and when they were come, entreated them to ask the Lord to remove the pests. If that was done by the morrow, he would let the Hebrews do their own will.

At the prayer of Moses, as quickly as they had sprang to life, the frogs dropped dead wherever they were, and joyfully the relieved people hastened to sweep them off the roofs, out of the houses and gardens, and gather the dead

bodies in open places, where they decayed in monstrous piles. A horrible smell blasted the air all over the ground. The frogs choked up the waters they were thrown into and, when they tried to burn them, the smoke created a still greater stench.

But, Pharaoh could sit at ease after the attendants had cleared the palace of the creatures, for he had perfumes burnt in plates in every nook and large cloths hung upon the air openings on the windward side of the residence, and he felt none of the sufferings of the poor. He took back his pledged word, and sent out mandates that the Hebrews should not be let stir. The magicians, too, showed before him that they could produce frogs at will, and this made him less willing to credit Moses' acts as coming from above.

Then Aaron, at his brother's call, stretched out his arm holding the rod once more and beat the ground at his feet. No sooner had he done so than the loose sand and dust began to move more than with the wind, for each grain became a living thing. And the atoms, swarming fast and thick, began to float about and crawl into every place however small and settled on man, woman and child, as well as beast. Bathe as they would, change clothes, shake their garments, burn wood in their rooms, these lice were on every body among the Egyptians. They crawled over and bit into the velvety flesh of the princess as the horny palm of the laborer. They hid themselves in the folds of silk as in the beggar's rags. They crept over the babe's cheek, and on the old man's beard. They made themselves nests in the soldier's helmet, and blotched the hands of the priests at the altars. They made a moment's repose a luxury unenjoyed by any Egyptian.

With all their knowledge of powerful woods, whose vapors destroyed animal life, the magicians themselves could



not keep themselves free from the torments, which covered their venerable hairs and robes of honor. They were told to perform this miracle, but lice were not to be hidden in bags like frogs, nor in bladders like blood, nor in moulds of clay like serpents, and they failed to accomplish the marvel. They themselves were among the loudest in appeals for their sovereign to accede to anything that would relieve them.

"The hand of a greater than earthly power must be in this," they acknowledged, with many a conclusive nod, for the presence of majesty could not make them stand unwincing under the bites and motion of the vermin.

But the king relented in no wise.

Early in the morning, Pharaoh was wont to come to the river's bank to bathe, and more than ever this was a thing to be desired now. Moses met him there, and said :

"Oh, king! the Lord demands you shall let this people go and serve him. If not, He warns you a dreadful plague shall befall you and yours, while his people shall be freed from the infliction. That will prove He can be as good to those who love him as harsh to those who decry His worshippers."

But "no" was as usual the answer.

The lice died, and fell back into dust, but, before the distressed Egyptians could draw one breath of joyous relief, the new visitation appeared. The ground blackened and the sky was darkened by the bodies and the air hummed with the wings of flies beyond number. Blue, black, red, golden, harmless, stinging, tiny and large, flies were born in every spot. One cloud came from the upturned earth and drove the farmer indoors, where they followed. Another mass settled on the fruit and ate it, bud, sprig and leaf. Still another myriad floated over a city and were blown into the dwellings. They buzzed about night and day and

respected nobody. They encircled the heads of the passengers and, muffle up their faces as they did, nevertheless, they found entrance and drove them wild with bites on ears, cheeks and lips. They chased the cattle till they tired them out in the fields. They drove horses and dogs mad. They covered the eatables and the tables. They drowned themselves in the milk and wine; they thickened the honey with their bodies. They seemed to delight in befouling everything fair, as gold, silver, and bleached clothes. It was useless to kill them by thousands, for multitudes replaced every smothered score.

But in the Land of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, all was innocent of the insects. Not a fly came near the cattle tranquilly grazing, and their tails and ears had no occasion to move. The water was pure of their touch, and sweet things even had no attacks from them. No sound like their buzzing was heard anywhere among the Hebrews, and they could scarcely believe that the Egyptians were surrounded and tormented within a few miles of them.

So does the good youth—who receives God's protection by his heartfelt prayers deserving it—so does he walk in the very midst of the evil-doers whose pleasures carry their pains with them, and he can hardly believe that they will obstinately keep on in the wrong, when happiness, peace, gladness unspeakable, always attends him who keeps the law. Strange that the difficult and painful should be preferred to the easy and joyful!

But not only did the flies do harm to the living, but to the dead, too, for they buried their eggs in the cattle they had killed, the dogs, horses and sheep, in the bread and cakes, in the fruit, and everything thus was infected. Horrible deaths befel those who ate incautiously and, before they could be embalmed, their flesh crawled into flies!

Pharaoh—though a dozen hands swayed great fans before him and over him at meals, though a large brasier burnt potent bark in his chamber—was none the less troubled with the flies, and, in agony from their ceaseless assaults and his want of sleep or rest, he called for the Hebrew brothers.

“Haste,” said he, “Make all ready, and sacrifice here.”

“How can we?” answered Moses. “Our religion tells us to sacrifice cattle, goats, and sheep. These are animals sacred to your subjects and we must not offend them. They would fall upon us and kill us for insulting them through death-dealing to their holy things. Let us go out into the wilderness where no man save ourselves can look on. God alone will see, and be pleased we have at last been enabled to obey him.”

“You shall be let go,” said Pharaoh; “go and sacrifice to your Lord, but you must not go far.”

“Three days’ journey into the wilderness only.”

“Delay not to entreat your God to rid us of these flies.”

“I go. But let the king beware of breaking his royal word a second time. The Lord who has done so much can surely do more.

The flies died away and disappeared, not leaving a scrap of wing or a fragment of leg anywhere. All rejoiced, but Pharaoh hardened his heart once more, and commanded his officers to watch the Hebrews that they should not stir. Uselessly, another time, Moses reminded the monarch of his pledge. As before, Pharaoh laughed to scorn the demand of the heavenly King. But, while the laugh was on his lips, the punishment descended.

Though the stock of the Hebrews were unharmed, not, so with the Egyptians. The sheep fell as if lightning struck in the meadows; the cows died at the milking-pail; the stable-doors, that had shut in on the living, opened in

the morning on dead carcasses ; the camels dropped under their loads in the market-places ; the asses sank swimming the streams or rolled lifeless on the banks ; the horses died in the very chariots of the king as he would have gone lion-hunting, and threw their riders, who may have risen, though the steeds never did. All the cattle died then : the gentle pony of the princess, the charger of the king, the war-horse of the guardsman, the dromedary of the merchant, the pet lamb of the peasant boy. But messengers came and affirmed to the king that not a beast belonging to the sons of Israel was otherwise than in the best of health. In spite of all this, Pharaoh was stern and unbending as ever.

So was he, though a plague came, which made every Egyptian shake to his bones. And he set his lip and shook his head firmly again, when Moses came to say :

“ That you, oh, king, may know our God is unapproached in might ; seeing that you are untouched by his might already displayed, more shall yet befall you. You dare to rank yourself with Him who holds the whole world as you do not hold your Egypt,—you defy him in not letting his chosen go,—you shall see and feel his anger. At this hour on the morrow, there will fall a hail, the like of which has not been seen in Egypt, from the day when the Nile was a tiny line of watery drops, to this of its wide channel. Let those who believe house themselves, and all they hold dear and would preserve.”

Those who felt that the power that had already so many times manifested itself, would not fail in its threats, did not go out the next morning, but saw to it that their servants and children were well under cover. Many though, like their ruler, were incredulous, and went to their labor as usual.

Moses held up his rod to Heaven. Heaven covered it-

self with clouds, and these split to let out lightning in bolts, balls and zigzags, while the shock of the thunder shook the earth, and was so continuous that echo was silenced. With the fire that fell, flaming stones, blue, yellow and red, that buried themselves in the ground, and dashed through weak roofs, hail came down also in immense lumps. It cut up the grass already scorched, it hammered the roofs and splintered the cut stone ornaments of the princely houses, it stripped the trees of leaves and then broke their boughs, it leveled the barley and flax, and unearthed the green shoots of rye and wheat. Men who had rashly stayed in the open land were bruised, and glad to hide under stones, or reach cover after a run in the pelting storm. Soldiers on guard had their head-pieces split and beaten in, and were forced to get in doors for fear of death. Streets and roads were deserted while the storm raged.

But the Land of Goshen was not intruded on by the hail stones and lightning, and peace set boundaries around it against the furious tempest.

The hail, amid the peals of thunder, rattled on the palace top, and made such a noise that the king could scarcely be heard in the shout he gave for Moses to be brought to him. They hastened to take cushions, two or three thick, on their heads and shoulders, before they dared run out and face the shower in a search for the Hebrews.

"I have sinned," said Pharaoh to them. "Your Lord is such a Lord as you declare Him. Entreat Him to stop this hail and lightning. It is enough. You shall be hindered no longer."

Then said Moses :

"I will prove to you in this, that the earth He created, as well as the heavens in which He reigns, is the Lord's. As soon as I leave the city, I will lift up my hands in prayer to my King. The storm shall cease, so you may know.



But you and yours are not believers yet, though you may say so when the evil days are on you. With sunshine, your terrors vanish."

The storm ceased at Moses' prayer, but, as he said, Pharaoh was just as unyielding. Moses warned him that on the next day, a new calamity should overwhelm his realm and his subjects, to make evident that the Lord could do wonders for those who pleased him and against those who were too proud to humble themselves to His incomparable might. The Egyptians shuddered at the threat and murmured to their monarch:

"Oh, master, how long shall this man Moses be a trouble to us? Are these slaves of Hebrews of so much value that we must keep them under us at the risk of Egypt being destroyed? Let them go, we pray you, and serve a dozen gods if they will. What is that to us, if we are happy as we used to be again."

And, at his nod, they called back the brothers to receive Pharaoh's words.

"Go and serve your Lord. But, who among you are going?"

"All," answered Moses. "Our young and our old, with our flocks and herds, would go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord."

But Pharaoh had them driven from him, for he would only allow the men to go into the wilderness, intending to keep the rest as hostages against their not returning.

Moses held out the rod over the land.

All that day and that night, a wind blew from the east, and when it was morning, it was seen that it had borne locusts on its wings. They covered the face of the earth so as to darken it, around, above and on the ground they were to be seen flying and creeping. They ate up everything their mouths could tear: the young plants, the old

trees, grass, grain, fruit, weeds, until there was nothing seen left in Egypt unless as a stump or a barked tree. The locusts were as impartial as the other plagues. They devoured the little plot of the poor man as they did the noble's vast estates, the serf's field as they did the hanging garden on the roof of the priests' temple, and they were in clusters and layers on the ornamental and rare trees and the earth of the royal pleasure grounds.

In all haste Pharaoh summoned Moses to him and implored him to remove this scourge. This was the last time he would be unrelenting, he said. But hardly had Moses' prayer led to a wind springing up that swept the insects, filled now, into the Red Sea, than the king became the same Pharaoh as before.

A darkness began to enshroud all the land, except where the Hebrews were, a darkness so thick as almost to be felt. Not the least work could be done. People bruised themselves and even fell from floor to floor in groping from room to room. No neighbor could help his neighbor. No one could attend to his cattle, and many kept their beds for the three days that the gloom lasted. A deadly terror was upon all; the alarmed children, no more seeing the mother's dear face, cried without stop; men fancied all kinds of hideous spirits were seeking them in the shadows; the few lights burnt themselves out or were useless in the deep obscurity. The king shuddered, and started, for fear every sound was an assassin feeling unseen his way to stab him. He would have compromised with Moses and let all the Hebrews go, but without their possessions. On Moses persisting in all going, down to the last hoof of their cattle, the king was wroth. The light had been restored, bear in mind, or, perhaps, he had not been so bold.

"Get you from me," said he, "beware that I never see your face again. That day I do, is that of your death."



But the end drew near.

In the dead of night, throughout Egypt, (and only not among the Hebrews,) death came to all the eldest children of every man, priest, soldier, farmer, and the king. Hardly a house was there, in which there was not a freshly stricken corpse.

The mourners came in crowds to wail at the palace gates, within which, too, the dearly beloved but lost were being mourned also. They found their bereft ruler but too eager to free them and himself of the Hebrews. In the night, they hastened to Moses and forced him to lead away his people. They gave the Hebrews everything that would prevent delay in their starting. And, speedily, the immense train of several hundred thousand, with their all, commenced their departure from Egypt, in which land they had been two hundred and fifty years. They bore the bones of Joseph along with them.

Meanwhile, Pharaoh had recovered from the first grief. Why have you let those servants go? should they not be made to work, if only in revenge for what they have brought upon us? Prepare, all you, my officers, put horses to the chariots, and I will lead you against the flying ones." The Hebrews were camping near the Red Sea when their rear-guard reported the coming of the Egyptian army, and they begun to groan against Moses. They were weak in faith, despite all their blessings.

In our times, too, we forget the good God to often when He blesses us, and remember Him only when we are tried. We pray for sunshine, but rarely are thankful when we are in its brightness and warmth.

But Moses bade them believe in the Almighty, and, in truth, the army was kept from approaching them and never came within stone's throw. Moses walked to the shore of the sea then, and, when he held out the rod, a violent wind

arose and heaped up the water right and left, so that there was a valley of dry land between the two hills of waves. Trustingly, the Hebrews marched, with all their trains by this road, and reached the opposite shore.

Enraged at the fugitives' escape, with shout, whistle, and blast of trumpet the charioteers dashed into the chasm, lashing the horses in fury, while the soldiers brandished their spears, bows and slings. They were all engaged in the miraculous path, and exulting in the triumph they fancied already within their grasp. Moses waved the rod.

From either side, the piled up, foaming waters fell inwards. Their waves closed in on the chariots, tore off the wheels, filled them, buoyed them off the ground and dashed them against one another. The soldiers, heavy with coats of mail and helmets of thick metal, flung away their weapons and tried to swim, but the sea rushed over them and forced them under. The spray leaped around Pharoah and the circle of devoted captains about him, and soon they too were playthings of the billows. The gladdening eyes of the rescued Hebrews beheld the dead bodies of their enemies flung on the shores, while black dots in the distant skies were vultures hastening to prey on the proud, who perished at the height of their glory.

After this, there was no further trouble from Egyptians. But the wanderers had many sufferings in the desert, many fights with warlike tribes who would have prevented their journeying, many trials, but—more for the faith of Moses than for that of the people—God held to His promises; never broken like man's,—and conducted them to the promised land. And Moses, who had from the days fifty years and more before, been truly a faithful servant of the Lord, died there—rewarded by seeing a people happy by his means—at the age of a hundred and twenty; all that time not having felt old age, as far as decay of natural force in sight, hearing or strength, goes.

*JOSHUA.*

JOSHUA was one who grew up a youth in the days of the Hebrews' wanderings in the desert after having escaped the revengeful pursuit of King Pharaoh of Egypt. He had been a boy carried in arms when the guide, that was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, hovered over the tabernacle, showed the way; he had seen the great sacrifices of the offerings of the heads of the tribes; he had heard the silver trumpets blow the alarms, he had eaten of the food fallen from heaven. In brief, he had seen and heard so many things that could not have come from earthly powers that, throughout the thousands, none could believe more firmly in the greatness and goodness of God than Joshua the son of Nun of the tribe of Ephraim.

It was when the tents of the great multitude were pitched in the Desert of Paran, near the land of Canaan, that Moses, by divine command, selected twelve men, one of each tribe to prevent his being accused of partiality, and when they stood before him, gave their orders thus :

"Take a southerly course and cross the mountain. Go down into the country and make a complete circuit of it, so that you can give a full report. Examine the soil, the water and the timber, and bring samples of fruit, if you can.'

The appointed ones took supplies of food, buckled up their belts, fastened their sandals, and, staff in hand, bade good by to their friends, and crossed the wilderness. Joshua was one of these men. In hiding from the strange people in the thickets, in going from one plain to another, from lake to river, from low land to high, they spent forty days. They came together from their searches at the end of that time and returned homeward. Caleb and Joshua carried on a pole between them a bough of a grapevine, full of fruit, for the grapes were on the point of ripening at that season.

The people flocked around them to hear the result of their scouting, and the mouths of the lookers-on watered as they saw the luscious fruit.

"The land," said Caleb, speaking for all, "is exceedingly good. It will be excellent for pasturage and for growing. Here is some of the wild fruit of it."

"Yes," said all the others but Joshua, "yes, it is a country flowing with milk and honey, but it contains many warlike tribes, and, besides, there is surely sickness in the air of the swamps. And the sons of Anak were seen by us, they are very, very huge men, so large that we were mere grasshoppers to them."

A shudder ran through the throng.

"Is not that true, Caleb, Joshua?" demanded the other ten cunningly, to entrap them.

"Yes, but the land is good——"

"Yes, or no—are not fierce giants there, in fear of whom we were fain to burrow under rocks like conies?"

"Yes," Joshua and Caleb were compelled to respond.

"So, brothers," said the faithless scouts, "of what use is the land if it were matchless, if we die in attempting to wrest it from such terrible men?"

The whole mass groaned, and tears fell from men's eyes.

They burst forth into one voice against Moses and his brother Aaron.

"Would to heaven we had died slaves to Pharaoh in the Land of Egypt! at least, there was enough and to spare of eatables. Would to God we had died in the desert before toiling so far! Oh, oh, oh! why have we been led here only to be slain by giants, whose very boys ten of our strongest men cannot hope to overcome! And our wives and little ones will also fall a prey! Better, better a hundred times the painful journey back to Egypt, be there what may!"

Before such an outburst, Moses and Aaron bowed themselves. Joshua and Caleb were wild with grief that the faithless ten should be believed before them, the faithful too. They rushed in among the excited people crying :

"The Lord send us death, if the land we searched was not a garden for richness! Do not go against the Lord, who promised us the land. Have no fear of the people, large or small, who are there. What are they, when God is for us."

But their own tribes even would not give them credence, and on their persisting to implore them and to assure them of their truth, the multitude took up stones and would have killed them. At that moment, all eyes were dazzled! It was just dusk, and yet it was lighter than noonday. The glory of brightest effulgence had suddenly appeared on and around the tabernacle. Hands dropped, heads bowed, and knees bent before that nimbus of heavenly light.

And they heard Moses pray, and commune with a voice, whose words their ears were not holy enough to listen to. When the law-giver rose, it was to say, with the solemnity and sternness of God's mouthpiece, but with the mournfulness of a man nevertheless.

“Oh, wicked, perverse people, who almost seem to try to tire out the inexhaustible patience and mercy of your Maker and Protector! You who saw the promised land and who have lied of it against Him who would have blessed you in it, you shall never more set eyes upon it. But your little ones shall view it, and shall remember their parents’ punishment to all time forth, and as you have spoken falsely of your *forty days’* journey, for so many years you shall rove the desert. But the Lord, who is all truth, loves truth, for it is purity. He rewards the little child who never tells a falsehood with many gifts—He will reward the men who have borne faithful testimony. Joshua and Caleb shall see the promised land.”

It was night when Moses ceased speaking, but the halo around the ark had more than replaced the sun. That night, before the mid hours had come, there was groaning in some tents. The ten scouts who had brought false news, were suffering with the plague and scarcely survived till dawn. There was mourning, besides that, elsewhere, and the eyes were red with repentant tears that watched the sun rise next morning. Many, thinking to expiate their offence, banded together and before the dew was beginning to dry, hastened to climb up on the highlands bordering the plain, from the tops of which they sent word to Moses, that they were only too ready to obey and go down into the country to be given them. At the words, a number more hurried over the plain from the camp to join the first ones.

It was in vain that Moses called out to these and told the others :

“Stop. Return. The Lord is our guide, when He bids, only then must we follow. His favor is not among you, but in the camp. Return.”

But they were heedless, and following one another like



sheep, they straggled down the mountain side, to pick berries and drink the cool spring water. They were espied there by some of the Canaanites who lived within sight of the chain of hills, and who, with some of their neighbors the Amalekites, gathered together a force sufficient to fall upon them and butcher them while they were feasting. Few indeed, were those who contrived to hide in the woods and creep back in terror to the encampment. Luckily, they did this unseen, and the victors did not suspect the presence of the larger body.

The beholders of this lesson, with their mouths still stained with berry juice, were only too full of corroborations of Joshua's description of Canaan, and he and Caleb were well treated by all in amends for their having doubted them.

It was at Meribah, in their roamings, that they were parched by the sun and hot sand, and besought Moses to find them water to drink. Joshua saw Moses give a huge rock two strokes with his sanctified rod, when a spring of delicious water gushed forth. Joshua was foremost among those who defeated the Canaanites at Hormah. When the wanderers were downcast because they had to go around the Kingdom of Edom, and were punished for their lack of patience, it was Joshua, by Moses' orders, who set up the pole surmounted by a brazen serpent, at the sight of which those who had been bitten by vipers were healed of their poisonous wounds. Joshua was a commander of a troop when King Gihon of the Amorites came into the desert to destroy the Hebrews, who, on the contrary, defeated them and drove them out of their villages, in which they dwelt. Joshua was captain of the scouts who forced the remnant of the Amorites to fly and beg help of King Og of Bashan.

This latter determined to punish the intruders. This king was a giant, and when he advanced there was much

fear among the Hebrews, but Moses and Joshua encouraged them and going out to meet them, killed him, his sons who fought beside him, and his principal captains. His kingdom became the Hebrews' possession.

Through all these journeys and in all these conflicts, Joshua bore himself firmly and bravely ; there was not his equal among the thousands. By battle, by the heat of the sun, by illness, by visitation of God, not one except he and Caleb was left of the many who had wanted to return to Egypt and not proceed to the promised region.

It was when they were within sight of Mount Nebo, that one day all were assembled.

There were the women and the children in the outskirts of the mass ; the young men were behind the elders and the chiefs of the tribe, who were before Moses. Old as the latter was, for he was more than a hundred, he was still as clear of eye and erect of form as the man in his prime that he called out of the ranks and had stand beside him.

"Brothers," said Moses, "you all know Joshua here at my right hand. I am twenty years more than a hundred and the work my good Master set for me to do, will soon be done. My brother Aaron is dead. Joshua—who can deny it?—is the only one who is fit to be your leader. He is brave, strong, sensible, and more than all, first of all, he has learnt that obedience to the Lord is better than fine gold. He has the Laws I leave to study. He will be your chief, and in the sight of all, I bless him."

Under the clear sky,—at their back, the desert, scene of their sufferings, in front, the tabernacle and the supernatural cloud hovering over it unaffected by the wind that tossed the men's and women's clothes and hair, and beyond it the land of their future joys—there in the barren sand, Joshua knelt, while the aged prophet extended his blanched hands over him.

Moses went up to the highest peak of the mountains of Nebo, called Pisgah, and surveyed the landscape. He saw how generous the Lord was to have chosen so peerless a spot for the dwelling-place of the weary-footed wanderers, to whose forefathers God had pledged the faith all their evil actions could not break. He lived but a short time after he had descended, and in the night Joshua and another (who had sworn this to him) buried him. No one else ever knew where.

The congregation had mourned three times ten days for the unequalled prophet, when the successor commanded the officers to get three days' provisions ready, for they were to make haste and cross the River Jordan.

Joshua had already sent two men as spies as far as the royal city of Jericho. They had contrived to get as far as it when their provisions gave out and they had daringly entered the place and bought food of a stand near the city gates. But their strange look, and the money they offered brought suspicion upon them, and a mob hunted them through the streets. They made out in the dark to enter the house of a woman named Rahab, which was near the city walls. There they stayed. The king received news of their refuge, and he sent a body of armed men to the place.

Rahab saw them coming and, guessing that some one had betrayed her and that the soldiers were destined for these she sheltered, she lost no time in taking the two Hebrews up to the top of her house. She happened to be drying some straw there, and under it, well spread, she concealed them.

The soldiers burst in, but, when they roughly demanded that the men of Israel should be given up to them, Rahab said :

"Indeed, were they the Hebrews? I thought they were

strangers. They did come here, two fellows, and they would stay till dark, when hearing the first horn blown for the ten minutes' grace before the gates were shut—they no sooner had asked me and I had no sooner told them what that meant, than they scampered away like sheep. I've no doubt you will overtake them, fast as they did go, if you delay no longer in their pursuit."

The soldiers went in the road as far as the River Jordan, across which they saw the encampment of the Israelites. Meanwhile, Rahab had returned to the couple she had hidden.

"You can come out, now," said she. "Sirs," she continued, when they had descended into her house, "sirs, we have heard of what god-like deeds your God has done for you, not alone in the Kingdom of Egypt, but against the mighty rulers Og and Gihon, and we have been terror-stricken. I believe, like many another, that your Lord is in all truth King over heaven and earth. I am not a good woman but I dearly love my mother and father and relations. I am not good enough to meet death tranquilly, myself. I beg you, therefore, to swear to me by your Almighty One, to spare me and mine, if you should march this way."

"You are right in fearing we will come hither, woman," said one of the spies, "but fear nothing. Our life for yours if we fail in our pledge."

Then she told them that, the gates of the city being closed after the pursuing party, no outlet for them but one existed. This was to let them down outside by a rope from her windows which overlooked the wall.

"Rahab," said the spies, "when we come hither, sure to be victorious by the power of our irresistible Captain of Hosts, make all those whom you love come into your house and"—"here's a rag off my torn tunic," said one. "Yes,

bind this," went on the other, "to this very window we are to escape by. Whoever dares harm a hair of the head of any soul whatsoever that is within these four walls, on him the judgment shall alight. But, if you are dealing falsely, this oath is no oath."

"I am true, you see. Very well."

She threw out one end of the rope, the other being fastened to her bed. The two Hebrews slid down and reached the ground in safety. As she had wisely warned them, they hid in the nearest mountains for two or three days, until the searching party had given up the fruitless chase of them and returned to Jericho.

In the meantime, Rahab had watched them till they were out of sight, then she drew up the rope and tied the piece of cloth to the casement.

The scouts passed over the stream, and reported all their journey to Joshua, assuring him that they would have an easy victory from the holders of the tracts to be theirs were faint of heart already.

By three days after, all was ready for the advance. Solemnly the golden ark was lifted by its staves and, surrounded by the priests bearing it, proceeded straight towards the River Jordan, which was more like a broad lake here than a stream, from its having overflowed its banks. On the other side glittered the roof-tops of the great city of Jericho. At a respectful distance behind the holy container of the covenant and laws, marched the two tribes of Gad and Reuben and many of that of Manasseh, fully armed, to the number of forty thousand. Then followed the rest.

The bearers of the ark were nearly at the brink, and still the waves rushed on as unaltered as ever. Some began to doubt. But Joshua, uplifting his hand and pointing over the water, his armor clattering the while, spoke in an unfaltering voice :



"Forward, priests: stop only when in the middle of the river." \* \* \* In awful silence the armed vanguard  
still to the rattle of their mail and the clank of their sword sheaths, passed by.—PAGE 57.







"Brothers and people, still again will the Almighty evince His power towards us and under the very walls of the city which is doomed. Forward, priests, stop only when in the middle of the river."

The bearers stepped on. Still the sheet foamed before them. But, just as the foremost pair put down their feet on what was covered with water, it fled before them. The current ceased to flow above the line of their passage, and, while the waters below rushed away tumultuously, leaving fish to flounder in the rising sun on the drying bed, the upper part of the divided waves banked itself up no less restrained in every drop than as if a strong stone embankment prevented its further motion. The priests, without damping the soles of their feet, passed on undelayed till they could halt in what had been the very depths of the broad river's channel.

In awful silence, the armed vanguard, stilling the rattle of their mail and the clank of their sword sheaths, passed by. The others followed, their steps deadened by the sands, only now seeing daylight since the Creation. The very children were quiet on their hushed mothers' breasts, and the beasts of burden and draught made no sound. By the orders of Joshua, a man from each of the twelve tribes took up a stone from the centre of the dried-up stream, and these stones were carried ashore to serve as proofs and remembrances for the future. And as many more rocks, but ones of far greater size, were piled up in the spot where the ark stood.

When the blank towards the desert was left unpeopled, all having crossed from infant to aged, the ark was taken up and borne to the shore crowded with the Israelites, for Joshua had ordered the priests to resume their march. At the instant of the latters' touching the riverside, the wall of waves burst its invisible confines : with a crash as

if a gigantic hammer it fell forward on the sandy bottom it had been debarred from, and a thousand jets leaping into the air caught the sunbeams. Then, crusted with white and yellow foam, and roaring and seething, the liberated mass rolled on like lightning in all haste to overtake the sister billows it had been divorced from. And there the children of Israel stood, on the edge of the hostile territory, the road which they had so used, converted once more into a vast stretch of running water.

But the Hebrews needed no road to retreat left open to them, for the news of so miraculous a passage spread through the country and all the country and the nations who heard of it were buried in affright. The Israelites set up their camp on the plains before Jericho, and a strong party went out foraging and returned with considerable of the last year's corn, taken from the granaries they had found abandoned, for the terrified owners had fled into the walled city for shelter. The manna ceased to be rained from heaven that day.

As it grew dark, Joshua, without a single companion except his sword, put a dark cloth over his bright armor, and went stealthily to the City of Jericho, for the purpose of examining the enclosure and discovering its weak points. He had gone so close as to see the watchmen on the walls, but had not been perceived by them, and he had selected several spots where it seemed an entrance might be made. His task thus accomplished, he was returning to his friends, happy that he had been neither seen nor interfered with, when a man, with a drawn sword in his hand, rose suddenly before him. Joshua was too brave to be daunted, and believing the soldier to be alone and feeling sure that the city gates could not open sufficiently quick to send this person help, in case of a fight, he strode towards him, his drawn sword in his grasp, and demanded :

"Who goes there? Come you from Israel or Jericho?"

The other answered, in a voice too musical for it to be even a woman's: "From the Lord of Hosts, whose captain I am!"

And his face glowed with a light which nothing mortal could bear, and Joshua felt that he was speaking to an angel in human semblance and garb. He lowered his sword and bowed his face to the ground.

"What has my Lord to say to his servant?"

\* \* \* \* \*

In consequence of the celestial communication, Joshua had the city encompassed, and for seven days the following was done: A large body of armed men formed a vanguard and escort to the ark, before which, and behind them, were seven priests, having rams' horns which they continually blew; an equally strong rear-guard closed and defended the procession. The first day on which this train had gone quite around the city, the people of Jericho, terrified at any unaccountable act of the Israelites, crowded the walls and gazed with countenances aghast. But as the thing was done day after day, and nothing resulted, the ruder ones began to laugh and jest, and hootings, and cries and peals of merriment saluted the marchers and defiantly responded to the priests' trumpets; and the sentinels aimed arrows at the Hebrews, whenever they chanced to come within shot from the inequalities of the ground.

Very early on the seventh morning, this train drew the ring of circumvallation, with the difference that they made the circuit seven times, all to the mockery and merriment of the sentinels and the populace. They came round the last time. There was a dead silence, for some impalpable foreboding filled the air and awed the loudest brawler. The priests' trumpets blared.

"Shout!" cried Joshua, waving his sword. "Shout! Our Lord has given us the city!"

As he spoke, and as a powerful clamor burst forth from thousands of throats, the sentinels on the wall were seen to turn pale. They felt something shake under their feet. Cracking, in a hundred places, the wall shuddered like a long line of aspen leaves, and bowing like a palm under a simoom, its extensive line of thick stone and bricks fell flat from its base along the ground, burying under its ruins and in its closing chasms the watchmen and the spectators who had been let crowd on it.

The triumphant cheers of the Hebrews was scarcely audible above the terrible crash, when a scream of fright and a groan of dismay arose from the besieged. They were given no time to recover from their amazement, for Joshua let loose his soldiers, crying :

"Spare only Rahab the faithful and her house! Upon them and strike!"

Over the fragments of stone, through the gates burst open by the shock, over the still trembling earth, and through the clouds of dust, darted the Israelites. The two scouts led one party straight to the dwelling of Rahab and hastily escorted her and her friends from the doomed city and left her in their own camps. The rest proceeded on their work of destruction. None could make head against them; in ten times twenty places, the houses where refuge was taken, were shaken in the foundations and toppled over; from ten times fifty other places smoke rose from fired houses. The flames spread, though there was blood enough spilt to quench them, and by nightfall, nothing was left living of the city of Jericho except they spared Rahab and her family, and nothing of other objects except

articles of the precious metals, which were kept for offerings to the ark.

Losing no precious time after this victory, Joshua sent scouts to bring reports of the approaches to Ai, and of the condition of that city. They returned with word that the city appeared so weak that three thousand men would no doubt be able to make themselves masters of it, for only about twelve thousand souls was the whole population. But the citizens of Ai were more warlike than anticipated, for they not only met the onset of the party of Israelites, stoutly, but, after killing thirty in a hand-to-hand fight, put the rest to flight and pursued them so hotly that they were not ill-pleased to find themselves in safety among their friends.

Joshua was angry at the defeat, for it would much injure his people if they came to be thought not wholly invulnerable, and he hastened to set thirty thousand men in the field against Ai, before the news should spread. These he sent away in the dark, with orders to keep near the city, and prevent messengers leaving it, but not to betray their presence. He followed with five thousand select troops in the morning. These were carefully and secretly ambushed beside the city, while Joshua, appearing with the larger party on the other side and front, made an attack. But when the enemy sallied out, his soldiers, obeying his instructions, pretended to be panic-struck and giving away slowly at first, soon were in what seemed a flight. And the fighting men of Ai massed themselves in chase, and let themselves be drawn away far from their stronghold by the supposed fugitives.

Joshua, who was on a hillock that commanded the plain, gave the order for his men to halt and wheel to face the pursuers. At the same time, he brandished high in air the spear he had in his grasp. At this signal the five thousand



in ambush, scrambled out of the valley they had been lurking in, and rushed into the undefended town, which was presently in a blaze in a number of points.

On being attacked by the hares which had so unexpectedly turned into lions, the soldiers of Ai were scarcely able to strike a blow, and on seeing the smoke roll in great black and red volumes from their homes, they fled themselves along the same road they had exultantly traveled. But, ere they had retraced their steps as far as their own crumbling gates, from them the five thousand, flushed with the ruin they had made, waving torches and bloody blades, met them face to face, and thus hemmed in, they fell dead, each with his three or four wounds. Even the cover of the night was no shield to any, and the last fell on the heaps of his comrades in the light of the flaming city.

The neighboring tribe of Gibeon, in dread of the Israelites hastened to yield to them. This excited the enmity of the five nearest rulers, and, under the counsel of the King of Jerusalem, they took the field to punish the Gibeonites, who had thus tamely submitted. So great was their array, that the latter were in great alarm, and in all haste sent one of their principal men to Joshua.

"You have promised, by your league with us, to see that we are saved from the penalty of making peace with you," he said. "Come to us as quickly as you can, for all the kings of the valley are a-field and may at any moment fall upon us."

"Have no fear," returned Joshua. "We all keep our oath. Go back and put courage in your countrymen's hearts. Say, Joshua is coming."

Instantly, he gave out marching orders, and suddenly that very night, he reached the field, where the large army threatened the less, and, barely waiting to rest and place his men, he led the charge himself. The men of the

Kings of Hebron and Jarmuth fled and would have escaped down the mountain side of Bethhoron, while their allies were holding the Israelites in check, but a dreadful shower of hail and meteoric stones rained upon them. Blinded with the lightning accompanying it, they lost their way, and, either struck down by the ærolites or tumbling into precipices, their dead bodies strewed the hillside no less thickly than their fellows on the plain.

The noon was past, and yet the onslaughts and the repulses, the charges and rallies, the routs and the re-formings, went on undiminished in fierceness, but the Israelites muttered, remembering how their foes at Ai had nearly escaped them in the gloom of dusk and fearing that here (where there were so many more) the enemy when routed, would be enabled to save themselves: "Would that the night were not coming."

The great globe of the sun, half way from the zenith, was slowly lowering and sending more horizontally its long beams over the scene of slaughter. And the moon, more silvery and yet a little tinged with red, was appearing brighter and brighter over against it in the sky streaked slightly with vapor.

It was then that Joshua stood up on a hillock among his generals and behind the long line of his men mowing a lengthy swathe of human stalks with the relentless sweeping of their dripping blades. Joshua let his sword hang by the thong round his waist, and clasping his hands and kneeling, he prayed.

As his lips ceased moving, every spot of cloud melted from the sky. The sun stood still and never had its rays assumed such refulgence. The moon, as well, ceased to stir, and her milder beams illumined the eastern sides of objects and prevented a shadow existing anywhere. There was a pause of awe as the strange, unheard-of light, ming-

ling orange and argentine, diffused itself on the flushed cheeks of the Israelites and on the pallid ones of their antagonists. There was a silence, too, and scarcely was a hot breath heard, a slash of iron or splintering of wood, for a space.

Then a deep murmur ran along the blanched lips of the foemen from the bowmen of Lachish to the spearmen of Eglon and to the swordsmen and javelinmen of Jerusalem. "Is this a man this Joshua, that the Maker of the sun and moon should grant his prayer?"

Their lines, already broken, split up still more and, each for himself, casting down their hacked and dented arms and defenses, the allies sought un-found shelter from the fleet-footed Israelites. But death fell on all, and it was all the more horrid to breathe the last gasp with that unchanging and evenly vivid blending of sun and moonlight in the fading sight.

"The great Captain is our leader this day!" was the war-cry of the Hebrews, before which sank the routed never to rise again.

After this battle it was one uninterrupted course of defeats to the enemies, and Joshua conquered the lands, altogether, of thirty-one kings. Joshua had spent his energies in such tasks, and he was, besides, loaded with years. Rest came to him and the people, and he proved himself as wise in peace as valiant in righteous war. Honored, and loved he died, having fulfilled a hundred and ten years, in no one hour of all of which had he ever doubted the power and kindness of the Being who had always heard his prayers.

*GIDEON.*

THE descendants of Israel were under the arms of the tribes of the east of Canaan. They had grown peaceful and had forgotten their Protector during the forty years of prosperity and tranquility that had been vouchsafed them. Every time of harvest, the Midianites or other robbers, collected their fighting men and made inroads upon Israel. Instead of making stand against them and attempting to repel them the Hebrews were satisfied to flee into secret caves, where they hid also their goods and grain. By degrees, as they encountered no opposition, the Midianites brought with them their camels and cattle and fed them in numbers on the territory they occupied, and thus injured the future crops. From their place of concealment the Israelites, who had found during the seven years they had been thus visited, that the idols which they had erected, had naturally left their appeals unanswered, began to turn to the only God. Their prayers went up from the caverns and clefts in the rocks. They were heard.

The robbers were hourly expected to come up through the valley and scour the country around the Abiezrites. The people were in motion everywhere ; some hurrying to

the mountains, others burying valuables in the ground, others vainly imploring help of their idols. A great number of the latter were collected around the altar of the principal idol Baal in the sacred grove, offering up gifts to entreat his intercession. Joash, who had this place of worship on his grounds, was there with his household.

His son Gideon, who had kept his faith pure, had not been willing to join with them, but, on the contrary, was threshing wheat so as to have the grain in smaller compass for the hiding of it from the Midianites. As he labored every now and then he paused to regard the fair country, to search the horizon for a cloud of smoke or of dust which would signal the invaders' approach, to eye in indignation his father, friends and household, who were at their sacrifices, for Gideon was of that disposition that he had always desired resistance to be made to the yearly incursions, and he was annoyed to see so many men weaponless and ready only to flee for shelter at the first alarm.

"Ah!" sighed he; "if the Lord would only be with us as of old. But, I suppose, we deserve it. We must deserve it, yes, for He is too just to have forsaken us in the hands of the robbers unless it was so. If I could only find young men willing to lend me a helping hand, I would call on His name, and see what the Midianites would say when an arrow should fly at them instead of we flying from them, and they should meet swords and shields, instead of plunder."

The last words were yet on his lips when from the void air, he heard the Invisible speak.

"Thou mighty man of valor, the Lord is with thee. Continue with your heart thus fixed, and you shall save Israel. I have sent you."

Gideon looked about him, but near him, within ear-shot there was not a living thing. He dropped his flail and,



knowing that the ground was hallowed at the moment by something more than natural, he knelt with bowed head.

"Oh, my Lord, for it is Thou alone who deigns to speak to me, I am but poor, and my family is of little rank in the tribe of Manasseh. Wherewith, saving thy substance, am I to rescue our land."

"The Lord whose angel I am chooses his weapons where he wills. The earthen jar is often set above the golden vase. Gideon of Manasseh, you are called. Not alone, but with the Lord's your arm shall strike."

"Oh, how I thank you that I so humble, should have found grace in thy all-seeing sight," said Gideon, rising. "Let me offer you, the messenger, my present ere you go."

And the answer was: "I will tarry till you come again."

With quick feet Gideon darted into the house, and speedily prepared a kid and some unleavened cakes. As he was told to do. The young man laid the offering on a rock, and poured the broth of the meat upon the rough face. As he receded and knelt, he saw a winged figure touch, with a silvery spear in his resplendent hand, only less lustrous than his radiant face and transparent garment, the gifts. A fire spread all over the stones and consumed the meat and cakes. When Gideon looked up, the angel was gone.

The Midianites did not come near that district during that day and, in fear and trembling, the people of Ophra reposed, not without posting watchmen.

Gideon was one of the sentinels around his father's farm. He led off, in the night, ten of the serving-men who stood on guard, into the sacred grove, and, while he set them at work chopping down the trees; he himself pushed off the idol Baal from the pedestal, and destroyed it and the altar. Then he built with other stones a new altar, on which he sacrificed a young bullock which he had had led with his



little band. He did this work in the night so as to be interrupted by his father or the citizens.

Morning came. The people ran about in amazement to spread the news that the dreadful Baal had permitted his image to be debased, and his altar overthrown, and the wood cut down. They thought that lightning from heaven had performed the work. But, as soon as they had noticed that there were marks of axes on the broken trees, they believed that the Midianites had penetrated there with a small party and accomplished the sacrilege. This idea, in turn was removed by the sight of the new altar, and the remains of the still smoking animal.

"Who has brought this evil?" was the question in everybody's mouth. "Who dare to worship a new deity to the prejudice of the mighty Baal?"

To this the answer came soon: "Gideon, the son of Joash."

"Considering that the appearance of the enemy was imminent from the protection of the idol being removed by such an insult and injury to it, the people, in anger as great as their fear, hastened to Joash's house, where, with fierce shouts, they demanded that he should give up to them his son, so that he might be put to death in expiation of the contempt he had shown to the object of their worship. But Gideon had already informed his father of all.

"Friends, brothers of my tribes," said the latter, "do you really plead for Baal? You know how I have contributed to his fame and glory by my many sacrifices, so I have some right in him. The grove stands on my lands, too. But I have seen my folly, friends. Baal is no god. If he were, would he have let a boy like my son fling him down in the dust, would he, if he were the Incomparable, let a rival be set up above him? No, no, a hundred times, no.

Let Baal fight his own battles. Let us, meanwhile, rally in the name of the real God of our fathers, who showed so many times His undeniable power."

Like himself, the Israelites had their eyes opened.

The Midianites and their allies had meantime marched on as usual without even a skirmish, but they were surprised when come to the borders of Abiezrites to see Joash and Gideon mustering a force against them. A sight so unprecedented did more than surprise them, it made them hesitate and fear. They encamped in the vale of Jezreel. The news spread through the tracts not yet molested by the ravages that Gideon had revived the ancient faith, that he was standing at bay against the encroachers, and that he called upon all his fellow countrymen to add their strength to his. It was like a flame among tow. Taking courage, the armed men began to pour in from all directions, and soon Gideon was at the head of an army of more than thirty thousand. The sight of such an array made the Midianites remain where they were on the hilly side of the valley.

The Israelites outnumbered the intruders as three to one, but the enemy were not too much alarmed at them for they conjectured that forty years of peace would not have made them very formidable. They did not dare advance from their strong position, but they did not think of retreating, they dreaded men at arms, those simple shepherds.

Meanwhile Gideon had considered. His design was not the mere beating back of the foe, which seemed very possible, but the re-installation of the true God. If he should descend on the valley with his deluge of men and overpower the Midianites, it was to be believed that his followers would proudly lay the victory to their own numbers and prowess. But he wanted to prove that success came

from the righteousness of the cause and not by its banded thousands.

But first, as it was a great responsibility, this leading so many men to death and pain, perhaps, he wished to be sure of his mission. So, at night, withdrawing himself from the camp-fires and the outposts he had visited, he knelt in a retired spot to entreat a proof.

"Oh, gracious Lord, I fear to take upon myself in youth so broad a burden, even in thy hallowed name. If I am still to be honored with thy task, may I ask this test, oh Lord? See I tear from my sheepskin coat a scrap of fleece. It is dry. I bury it in the ground. If the dew shall fall all round about, and yet if it shall only damp the wool and leave dry the earth around, I shall know I am yet favored, and that Israel will be saved."

He did so. When he rose early and hurried to the spot, he disinterred the piece of his coat. The ground was unwetted for yards around except by his own footprints, for the grass was soaking by which he had come. But the fleece was heavy in his hands and he wrung drops from it a whole bowl full.

A day passed. At night once more, he knelt.

"Merciful Lord, who is slow to anger, let not thy wrath be enflamed against thy servant. Only this once, this once only, do I venture to doubt. Let me test again with the fleece. I bury it. Let the fleece be dry, and the ground wet, if thou wilt, my Master."

The dew fell heavily as rain that evening; the sentries could scarcely keep the fires a-blaze from the sheets of moisture; their coats and the tents were glistening with the fine watery drops. But, when Gideon took up the wool it was dry as if from air even. Yet the earth surrounding the little grave which it had occupied was soft with the abundance of the fall.

Then Gideon, at ease, proceeded to reduce his force. He proclaimed that those need not stay in face of the foe who were afraid, or were more urgently required home. Two-and-twenty thousand of the host took advantage of the permission and left the camp. Of the ten thousand left, Gideon determined to take only the hardier ones. To find these out without loss of time, he set the whole of them in motion as against the Midianites still on the other hillside. In going down the mountain, they had to cross a torrent which ran pretty deeply from the heavy dews of the previous night, which had filled to overflowing the spring of Harod. The army stopped on the bank to drink.

Gideon watched his men with a careful eye. Some delicately looked around for vessels in which to scoop up the water and carry it to their mouths; others took pieces of bark and hollow stones as cups, those that had vessels used them, and those who had none formed ones out of their joined hands. But the soldiers whose minds were set upon action, had no such carefulness, but went down on hands and knees to the water and drank in that way, or by lapping it up like a dog. These Gideon chose.

He halted his host, and picked out the men he had observed, who amounted to nearly three hundred.

It came on dark. When the shadows had deepened and not only gathered thickly in the depths of the vale, but ascended like palls to the tops of the hills, Gideon, with only one man, left his friends and stealthily glided down into the valley. Keeping in the darkness, the two crept along to the mainbody of the Midianites which was on the Hill of Moreh. By lying on the ground and dragging themselves along like serpents, their swords muffled up in their scabbards with their cloaks to prevent a sound, the two spies had the fortune to slip within the hostile lines between two of the camp-fires. These watch-fires extended to a great

distance, for they hedged a very large army, from the Midianites having been reinforced by other scattered bodies of the plunderers who had rallied around them on the news of the Israelites having made a stand. The low flames fell upon the slumberers and on the watchers who kept guard over the immense herds of cattle stolen from the abandoned farms, and over heaps of pillaged goods.

Gideon's eyes flashed as he saw what an amount of damage the robbers had already done. But some words spoken near him drew thither his and his companion's attention. Two soldiers were asleep quite near where they had crawled and hidden, but, though Gideon had not made a sound, one awoke.

"Wake up, man of Oreb," said he to his comrades, "by the head of my father, but I have had a strange vision; would you believe it, I thought some how or other that a great cake of that unleavened bread that these sheepish warriors the Israelites used to offer up to the God they tell so many fables about, rolled down the hill yonder where the Hebrews have been massing themselves this last week, down into this valley, and up into our camp, where it ran against our chief's tent, which was struck to the ground, as low as if a simoom had swept over it. Ha, ha, what could have filled my head with such a fancy?"

"Well, I don't know, comrade," said the other, but more seriously, "it would seem to mean nothing less than that this youth Gideon, who is reported to be over the host opposing us, is to get the better of us."

And they began to wake their fellows, and tell them of the dream. As they interpreted it, each to his pleasure but most all like the second soldier, Gideon stole away with his follower and regained his command. He awoke all the thousands and bade them be in readiness, while he called together his three hundred. These he divided into



three companies, and made each man take a trumpet of metal or horn, an empty earthen jug, and a lamp. They lit the latter but hid the flame in the pitchers, as they moved cautiously down through the bushes mantling the mountain side.

He led them as close as he dared to the line of Midianite sentries. Then he gave the orders, and added: "When I blow my trumpet, which you will know from its silver tone, be that your signal to carry out my orders and raise the war-cry. In the Lord be your trust, every man!"

They scattered thereupon and filed off right and left, till they found an outer line to that of the enemy's outposts in a half-circle around their front. For a moment the silence reigned as completely as the gloom. The Midianites, still seeing the Hebrews moving about in the glimmer of their own fires on the opposite eminences, were far from dreaming that part of them were already below the height.

All of a sudden, directly in their faces in the centre, there split the still air a long tantara from a silver trumpet. The watchers started from their semi-sleep on their spears, and looked and listened. On all sides before them, many blasts arose from behind rock, bush and tree, the prolonged, deep bellow of a cow's horn, the hoarse rattle of a ram's, the harsh clang of a brazen bugle, and leader of all, the silver-voiced again. And as the vale was past, so the darkness disappeared, for on either side and before, lights gleamed out and darted fierce rays after the fugitive shadows. And to add to all, an indescribable crash deafened the ear. The men of Gideon had shown the horns held in their right hands, had dashed the pitchers against trees and stones, and swinging the unveiled lamps over their heads with their left hands, united to cry like one man for unity and like the thunders for force:

"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon is upon you!"



A panic as universal as powerful seized the whole host of the invaders. Starting up out of sleep, and seeing the advancing row of flashing lamps with half-opened eyes, they might well be startled. In the far-off, as well, a mighty echo had caught up the war-cry, and—as the thousands of Israelites sped down the hill-side through the splashing surface of the waste water of Harod's spring—they lifted up the shout:

“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon is upon you!”

Not a man dreamt of resistance or delay. No thought of plunder, horse, camel, or friend. Self alone was the motto, in that headlong flight. They pressed themselves into narrow defiles, they trod down one another. The weakest went to the wall and were pushed over precipices. They mistook their own fleeing comrades for the pursuers, and, the swords flashing out in the gloom and the spears being couched and the bows being bent by tremulous fingers, they slew one another by scores, and did not find out the error. Besides, a shower of stones and darts began to fall upon the rearmost, and these latter rushed on and prevented the rallying no one thought of attempting.

There never had been so great a defeat since the days of Joshua. The border of the Israelites was extended far into the enemies' territory by the victories that followed. When these things had been accomplished, the Hebrews, more grateful to the visible instrument than to the invisible but Evident Power, desired Gideon to rule them.

“Brothers,” said he, “only the Lord should be over you. I will not take the government, nor shall my son succeed me, as you wish. If you are determined to show your gratitude to me rather than to Him from whom were the victories, let every one of you give me the ear-rings from the slain foemen.”

With the precious metal thus obtained, Gideon made a

rich girdle for the priests. But he would not receive any reward throughout the forty years of peace and happiness, during which he lived contented by seeing the pleased country around him looking up to the King of Heaven alone, Gideon spent his long and blessed years.

*SAMSON.*

CHOSEN PEOPLE as were the Israelites, they murmured under good rulers and were very dissensious, each of the twelve tribes claiming superiority, and, though heaven had evinced its power on their behalf as it had never done to any nation before, yet they gave to it neither praise nor gratitude. Hence they had removed from them the shield which they did not recognize, and, after the short rules of certain chiefs who succeeded the great Gideon, their country fell into the hands of their continual foe, the Philistines, at whose mercy they remained forty years.

There was a man named Manoah, who was of the tribe of Dan, and lived at Lorah. His wife was one day in the house, alone with her little boy, an infant in arms, when a figure in the form of a man, but with a radiant face, appeared before her. She was dumb with terror and surprise. But he smiled for her to abate her fright, and said :

“ Woman, take heed. This your child is a Nazarite from his birth. He shall free Israel from the Philistines.”

She raised her amazed eyes, but, as he spoke, he was gone. When her husband returned, bearing news of yet another neighbor being despoiled of his ox, or grain, or grapes by some over-riding Philistine who was task-master over that part of the country, he found his wife agitated and contemplating her little son with a singular expression. She told him of the interview.

Manoah had no sooner heard than he prayed that once

again his humble house might be honored and blessed by a visitation from on high. And again the angel did appear in the sight of the woman, who was in the field this time. She ran to the pasture where Manoah was, whom she led without delay to where the holy messenger was standing. They bowed low.

Manoah, with bent head, asked :

"How shall we treat the child thus devoted to heaven."

"I have said. He is to be a Nazarite."

Manoah rose with reverence. He saw the vision was not of the earth, but still he did not know its degree.

"Stay, I pray thee," he said, "let us detain you till we serve up a tender young kid for your entertainment. We are poor, but the messenger of good tidings should surely have our best."

But the spirit said, smiling celestially.

"I wait, but not to partake of your fare. Not to me, but to the Lord, should you offer the kid, as a sacrifice."

"What is your name?" said Manoah, "we would honor you when these things shall have happened."

"My name is not for earthly lips to pronounce. Honor alone the Lord!"

Manoah lost no time ; he killed a kid, took a rock for the altar, lit the fire and put on it the offering. As he did this to the Lord, and the blaze rose from the delicate fat of the young animal, the angel-messenger ascended and vanished in the flames that shot up. Manoah and his wife fell on their faces and prayed.

"We shall surely die," said the man, "we and our little one, for it is one from heaven that our eyes have gazed on."

"Nay," said the wife, "if it had been the Lord's will to have sent us death, He would scarcely have been pleased to have received the burnt offering from us, nor would these

things of the future have been revealed to us. No, we must do the bidding."

The boy, whom they called Samson, was brought up according to the laws of the Nazarites, that is to say he was never to drink wine or any other strong drink, or vinegar made of wine, or grapes, fresh or dry; or eat anything made out of the grapevine, from bark to bud. And he was never to shave or let any sharp instrument remove a hair of his head. Devoted to the Lord, then, he grew up to man's estate. He had so far shown nothing of the future mission on which he was, except that his countrymen had often heard him speak boldly against the Philistines, their masters, and that he was remarkably strong.

In a visit of his to Timnath, he saw and fell in love with a Philistine girl. When he returned, he insisted on his parents' going and asking her in marriage to him.

"But, Samson," said his father, "can you, who so deeply inveigh against the oppressors really mean to espouse one of their daughters? Is there no woman among your sisters of the tribe or among all your people, who deserves you better?"

But Samson was resolved.

"Father, I have reasoned in this same way with myself. All I can say is, she delights me—get her for me, I pray you."

He accompanied his father and mother to Timnath. In the vineyards of that place, Samson heard a lion roaring, and bidding the old couple proceed without him, he turned back without their suspecting his intentions. He had not retraced many of his steps before the roaring grew louder. He replied by taunting words, which, whether the beast understood or not, had the effect of bringing him over through the vines he had been down-treading, towards

the man defying him. His roars changed to growls, and then he crouched and sprang. Samson eluded his leap, rushed on in turn as the disappointed beast rolled over in the dust, and, first breaking his jaws by happily catching them open and forcing the lower from its socket, tore him to pieces by sheer strength of arm. Leaving the body there in the hedge, he quickened his pace and overtook his parents, to whom he did not explain his delay.

The preparations for the wedding went on smoothly, and the feast was being made ready. In one of the lulls of the preliminaries of the bridal Samson, in walking the fields, was led by curiosity to turn aside and see whether the carcase of the rent lion had yet been removed by the laborers of the vineyard. It had not, but lay there. But, singularly enough, a swarm of bees had established their queen in the open mouth, and had already erected several galleries of wax and honey. Samson gently removed a large honeycomb and was eating on the road while returning. He gave part to his father and mother, but still said nothing as to what he had done or as to how he had obtained the delicacy.

The guests of the Philistine wife were some young men, besides her parents. When heated with the feasting, they did not hesitate to boast of the superiority of their race over the Israelites whom they had subdued. They were not satisfied with claiming a more warlike disposition as shown by their victories, but went farther and spoke vauntingly of their greater excellence of mind. Samson did not notice their discourtesy in so speaking at this his table, but at the first opportunity to slip in a word, said :

“My friends, I am but a simple Danite myself, yet I do not feel disposed to grant you, our masters, everything. I have even on my mind a little riddle, which I believe will distress even a Philistine’s acute intellect.”



The voice of all arose to demand the puzzle, all the tones confident of victory before they knew the extent of the action to be won.

"Ah, stay," said Samson, "let us make our assertions appear better based on our beliefs. I am willing to take the risk thus, albeit I am not rich: I give you the seven days of my marriage festivities. If you shall have guessed the dark saying before or by that time, well, I will give you each a suit of clothes and a fine sheet of linen. But if you do not find it out, well again, it is you who will give me each a change of raiment and a sheet of fine linen."

"Agreed, agreed," cried the whole thirty of them, smiling eagerly, "put forth your puzzling saying."

"My little simple riddle," said he. "Out of the eater came forth meat. Out of the strong came forth sweetness."

A number of hasty answers burst forth at the moment, but Samson shook his head to each.

Before the third day, they had found out that their wits were far from being capable of solving the mystery. As they hated more to have to confess their inferiority to a Hebrew, than the amount of the forfeit, they had recourse to secret means. They had an interview with Samson's wife, in which they threatened her.

"You must by your allurements obtain the key of your husband's enigma. If you will not promise so to do, remember, we will fire your father's house and he and you will perish in the ruins."

In deadly fear, she passed her word. Indeed, when her husband next came to her, she was in tears, and when asked why, had no other reply than:

"No, you do not love me! you would not be afraid to confide in me if you did. Here you have made a great riddle, and though you see how curious I am about it, still you will not impart its meaning to me."

"But," returned Samson, "I have not spoken of it to my dear father and mother. So it is no great harm that I should not have told you."

But she would not listen to reason, then, instead of the rest of the feast days passing dancingly in the sunshine of smiles, nothing on her part was but the showers of tears. On the last day, to make her happy once more, Samson told all. She, of course, transmitted the valuable mystery to those who had menaced her.

No wonder, hence, that before the sun set on the last of the seven days, the thirty Philistines could reply :

"What is sweeter than honey? what is stronger than a lion?"

"The grace of God is far sweeter than honey, and His power is more than a multitude of lions," muttered Samson, but he only said aloud : "you are right, and you have won, but—if you had not taken my flower, your garden of wisdom would not have so blossomed out."

He went over to the town of Askelon and, there having a quarrel with some Philistines, who recognized him as a Hebrew who had often preached resistance to their rule, he had to fight. He slew thirty and drove the rest into the town. With the clothes of the killed, he returned. He gave them to the cheating winners of the wager, but withheld the promised sheets. They asked for no more, conscious as they were that the powerful Hebrew had full knowledge of their trickery. But, angered, Samson spoke to them, and to his wife harshly, and returned to his father's house in wrath. For his part, the father of his wife took advantage of the moment, and hastened to give away his daughter's hand in marriage to a Philistine, notwithstanding the solemn vows she had entered into.

When the harvest was gathered, and Samson disengaged from helping his father, for his great

strength was only too useful on the farm, remembered his wife, and in spite of the danger in such a journey, he, with a tender young kid as a present, went down to Timnath. But his father-in-law would not let him into the house, would not give him a word or a look on his divorced wife,

"You know how you acted on that day of your nuptials. Was I wrong to believe that you hated her? So I gave her to one of her own race, breaking the bonds which you had already snapped, so that she might make the new ones."

Samson lifted his brawny arm to heaven:

"As my Lord liveth!" said he, "you and yours shall regret this!"

"Nay, nay," said the other. "Listen. She has a sister, younger and fairer than she. Take her, I pray you, take her to wife."

"I loved her, not because she was fair, but because she was that woman she was. I care for no other," said Samson, and, conquering his prompting to make a forcible entrance into the house, he turned away to walk off his sadness in the fields.

As he wandered through the vineyards, whose fruit was ripening without requiring the presence of workmen, the sight of some foxes writhing in the sprung jaws of the traps set prevent them unaking the vintage on their own account, gave a new idea to his revenge-filled mind. Cutting up his outer coat into strips (it was strong linen and made passable cords), he went over the yards right and left, and collected all the entrapped beasts, traps and all. He made a pile of dry brush and besmeared the sticks with the ooze from the fir trees. Then, with the lines he had twisted, he tied the foxes together in pairs, by the tails, and, attached to the point of union a bunch of the brushwood. Then firing this, he gave liberty to the terrified

animals. So with them all, which made a hundred and fifty brace.

Alarmed, in pain, snarling and snapping at one another, the beasts, at first rolling over one another and fighting to get loose, found that impossible and careered over the country, too much maddened to think of seeking safety in their burrows. Some scented water in the ponds filled against the watering of high lands, and dashed through fields towards it. Their flaming appendage scattered its sparks and darted its lambent tongues among the grain, dry, ripe, and ready for the sickle. This flamed up like tinder, and whole masses of it were consumed. Other foxes carried the destructive element through the vineries, of the trees of which they kindled the dried bark and ruined the grapes which bursted in the heat and scattered their hissing pulp on the ground. Other poor sufferers, wild with agony at their hair being frizzled on their sides, rolled into the first shelter, as granaries, stables and houses, and were like so many living torches. Still others, their resinous flambeaux unextinguished, sought to quench their tormenting burden by rolling on the damp ground under the olive trees, but these caught fire and blazed with their oily sap like so many gigantic candlesticks.

The Philistines had to turn out in throngs to prevent the spread of a conflagration ignited in more than a hundred points at once. Searches were made for the incendiary, for the foxes, dead with exhaustion, terror and burns, were found here and there. When the story was told and it was discovered that Samson was the author of the evil, fierce and high ran the invectives against him. But when, in turn, they learnt that the reason of this revenge had been because the Timnite had refused him his wife and given her to another, the Philistines were too just not to seek to exact the penalty from the proper person. In a mob, blind-

ed with passion, the farmers who had lost in fruits, trees, and houses by the incendiary, rushed on the dwelling of Samson's father-in-law, to which they applied the torch, in obedience to the wicked law—to which the Golden Rule is as the sun to darkness—do unto others as others have done to you. In the flames perished not only the father, but the innocent daughter. They would not let her save herself, but pushed her back into the consuming house.

For their cruelty Samson said : “ Although you have done justice, yet you have blotted it out with the unwarrantable crime you have committed. I will be avenged on you.”

The lords of the land heard this menace against them, and, ever ready to silence a complaining voice in the dread of its finding too many echoes from a burdened people, they sent a force, somewhat numerous on account of the highest opinion of his unparalleled strength being but too well grounded, which by means of spies, found out his whereabouts, one day when he was gathering wind-broken wood in a forest. They crept stealthily towards him, from all directions, for they had taken the precaution to form a ring around him, sheltering themselves with the trees, and hushing even their breaths, and holding their sword-sheaths in their hands to prevent them striking anything and betraying them. When within as great a proximity to the woodman as they dared venture, they halted, with beating hearts and bated breath, to await the signal for them to discover themselves. It was not until Samson had bound his monstrous faggot, and placed it, as lightly as another might a feather, upon his broad shoulders, that the leader of the Philistines judged it the best moment for the attack.

A number sprang out from around the huge oaks in his face, ten at either hand, and a score or more leaped over the leaf-strewn ground on him from behind. Encumbered



as he was, as many hands as could be laid on him tightened their hold where they grasped.

An exultant shout burst from the armed men. But, fearless of the swords flashing in his eyes, of the threats, of the fingers clutching at his throat, Samson, recovering from his surprise, shook his shoulders. The great bundle of wood rolled off and crushed its way down among the assailants from behind. He extended his arms right and left, and the men, stout warriors as they were, were spurned from him as a stag shakes off the dewdrops from its neck. The daring soldiers who had caught him by the throat and breast, hung on and still hung on, but his hands—those hands of steel, as it were, through which circulated a power more than human to impel their motion—dashed off with force beyond resistance. Samson stooped, perhaps fortunately for him, for three or four hurriedly-darted javelins hurtled over his bowing head and buried their points out of sight in the earth or trunks of trees, their poles, thus suddenly arrested in their onward flight, snapping off like dry willow twigs. The Philistine soldiers had been especially cautioned not to harm the strong man, but to capture him alive, but those who had aimed the projectiles had been the ones hurled from him so violently, and the pain in their bruised and displaced limbs had made them forget their orders.

Samson had bent merely to pluck a thick piece of a branch bound up in his bundle of firewood. With this in his hand, he rose. With it whirling round his head he advanced, instead of awaiting their onset. A semi-circle of shields and blades, with a spear-head here and there clustered before him, the javelin-men being behind the front ranks, and restrained by their officers. Simple death to the preternatural Israelite would be nothing: of so mighty a rebel should be made an example; tortures, all that the



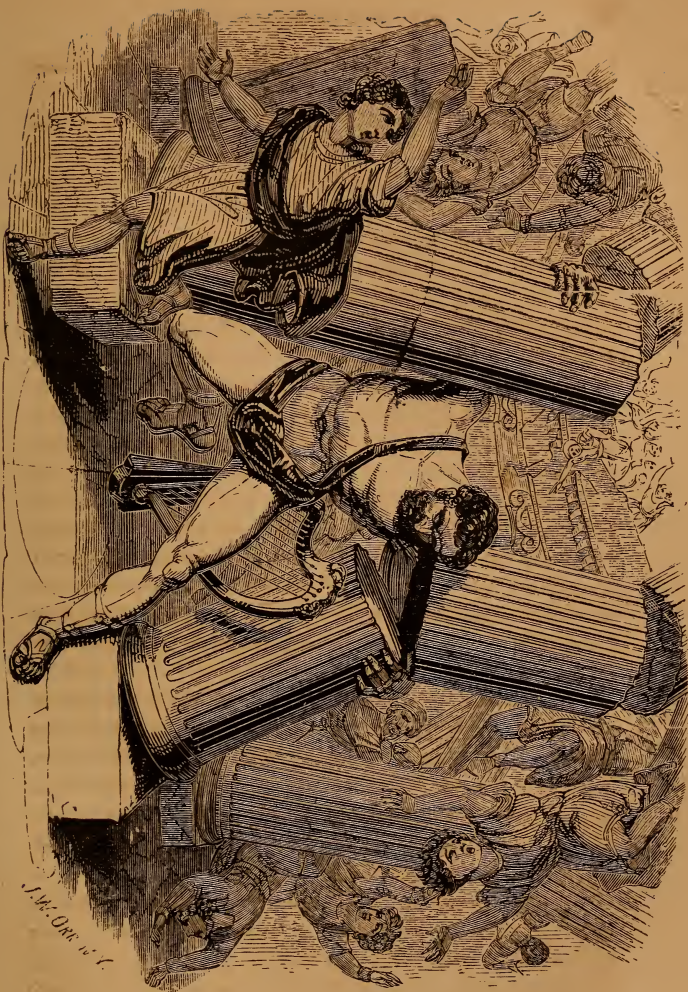
human mind could devise of agonies being in them, were the only punishment beseeching him.

In vain a blade rose over its owner's head to parry the lifted club, but this weapon was superior to opposition, and by the very steel itself, driven down into his skull, the soldier died. In vain a shield was planted before its master's breast, crushing the thick bull's hide target, studded though it was with brass nails, like a mushroom, the wooden bar stretched the man with shattered ribs on the earth beside fallen brothers, the buckler, with its edges arching round like a trough, dented into the large wound. In vain a dozen spears crossed into a network of deadly points, it only needed the bough to describe a circle, and, while the steel heads flew into the tops of the young trees, the splintered staves, scarcely held in the benumbed hands, lowered with a tremor. As a shepherd's boy with an osier's switch, cuts down the budding tops of noxious weeds, so Samson felled his enemies. The bravest of the remainder tired themselves out with sudden circuits and charges on that one man's sides and rear, but, always defeating those who faced him, in time to turn, he was found at each and every attempt, fronting the wily foe.

At last, sick of such slaughter, and his club, barked hacked, splintered and broken even, by the many wardings off from instruments of steel and iron, thinned down into a mere stump in his hand. He heard the officers, regardless themselves of anything but immediate revenge, cry hoarsely:

"On the accursed son of Dan! Death, death to the Israelite! To your spears and arrows!"

"As they rallied, dropping swords and heavy spears, to seize instead their bows and darts, and as they fitted arrows to the strings and poised their lances, Samson, dropping his worn-out weapon from his hand not worn-out, leaped into their very midst, and, then he retreated, unchecked, for



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Samson had grasped with either hand a pillar, and irresistibly had hugged them toward his breast.  
\* \* \* \* A scream arose from a thousand lips.—PAGE 112.



they were far, even from him, expecting such temerity, he held, covering his broad chest in either hand, a man whose gilt breast-plate and plumed helmet proclaimed them the chief surviving officers of the remainder of the band.

"Stay, stay!" cried some to prevent their friends from letting slip their bolts and from casting the levelled darts, "it is our captains the rebel has seized."

As they stared and stood in indecision, Samson, still making living defenses of the futilely struggling captains, disappeared, walking backwards in the wood. Once out of bowshot, he disarmed his captives, dropped them into a large pit which had been a wild goat trap, and went his way. When the Philistines, guided by their officers' shouts, arrived upon the spot, they could see nothing of the Hebrew champion. It is true there was none so vindictive as to overcome his terror and wish very heartily to confront once more him who had displayed before them unrivalled prowess and address. They took up their disabled comrades, who were not killed outright, on litters made of branches, and took them to the chief post of the military guarding the district. While some went back as guides to care for the dead, others were pilots to a strong detachment which went with all speed straight to Manoah's house. But his son was not there, nor had he been seen since he had gone to the forest just after the heat of noon. They left a guard there, but they watched in peace: Samson was not seen by them.

The truth was he had gone, during the night, through, the neighboring district of the tribe of Judah, avoiding the Philistine quarters, for fear of the sentinels, and the villages of his brothers for fear of their dogs giving the alarm. He reached the uncultivated country, and took refuge in the Hill of Etam. But as he had come too hastily

to be supplied with food, he had to come down into the valley land and beg wherewithal to eat of his countrymen. He did not tell them anything of the late conflict, or make any reply to the questions put to him and caused by his torn garments, from which he had been unable to remove all traces or all the blood from the action.

A messenger, with an account of the affair, having come to the land of Judah, as to all other neighboring parts of the governed conquest, they set inquiries afoot there as to the hiding-place of the fugitive. They were overjoyed, therefore, when at almost their first words, they were informed that Samson dwelt on the hill-top quite near. With a large armament, the Philistines marched that way. At the village under the mountain-side, the frightened people came out to meet them and prevent the evil which they feared so mighty a corps portended. They were greatly reassured when they found that, not they, but the man who tried to bring about their freedom, was the aim of the expedition. The men of Judah volunteered to bring Samson down to the seekers, for they were—so tame and fluttering had become their hearts under the yoke—fearful that, should the giant in strength only be taken by them, at a great expense of blood, the Philistines having the means at hand to revenge themselves, would wreak their spite on the villagers.

The fugitive had espied, from his eyry the marching of the large body on the road ; they had looked to him at so great a height like a glittering caterpillar of steel and brass undulating along between the green pastures. He was surprised in some degree, therefore, when, instead of armed men climbing rapidly up the rocky side towards him, a collection of men, mostly graybearded, numerous it is true but without other semblances of weapons than their walking-staves, slowly ascended by the path which the goats and



the more adventurous among the sheep had made. He believed it to be a stratagem during the first few moments, and little withheld him from rolling down upon them a massive rock, which would have without fail lessened their numbers by half and cleared the rough pathway as with a giant's broom. But he curbed his impatience on noticing that the faces were those of his countrymen, and, more, on closer scrutiny, that they were some that he knew to be dwellers in the village below.

However, not to fall into a snare through unpardonable recklessness, he called out for them to stand.

At the words, they looked up, as many of them as could see from the winding nature of the narrow pathway, and they could not prevent a shudder creeping over them on beholding Samson gazing down, a rock as large as a goat-house by his shoulder, which seemed to threaten to dislodge it upon them. They stopped, and the halt continued till the three thousand of them were all at a stand-still.

"Is not that Samson the son of Dan?" asked the men of Judah.

"It is that lover of his country," was the reply, in which was the tincture of reproach he could not help showing towards the sluggards in the cause of liberty.

"Samson, if you be that, all will be well," said the elder of the tribe who spoke for the rest. "The Philistines are below in great force to seize you for rebelling against them. Why have you done so—why do you do so? Do you not know they are rulers over us?"

"Do I *not* know they are over us? Would you obey them now and do their labor else? You who are descendants of the Judah whose father said that his sons should be like lions in their prime, whose paws should be on their dead foeman's neck, who should have their own brothers bow down to them! Yes, yes, servants of the idol-wor-



shipping Philistines, you seem to be those who shall gather the people!"

There was a flush at this sarcasm came to the aged cheeks of the elders, for they could look back beyond the long oppressive rule of their conquerors to their own judges, and to their fathers, who had told of Joshua the soldier of God. But they were old, and they preferred the slavish life at least ensured under tyranny to the risks of battling for rights. Had the young men come up the mountain side, perhaps they would have been so affected by Samson's speech as to have let him lead them down upon the enemy.

"Samson," said the elders, "we would stay the useless shedding of blood. We fear it may fall upon your own head. Will you never cease in your going against authority? There are laws against you, holy laws."

"Fathers," said he in return, "there is our great law of the Moses who brought us out of Egyptian tyranny, which could hardly be worse than the Philistines. Its words are: Life for life, eye for eye. As they have done to me, I do to them. I loved my wife of a week as Adam loved his, the first! The Philistines gave her death! She was to me more precious than a thousand thousand lives of them, oh, worshippers of stocks and stones!"

They respected his sorrow, and they looked up with silence and with surprise, at the strong man, whose eyes filled with tears, whose rude voice was rougher with the same emotion as shook his well-knit, stalwarth frame.

"Samson," said they, at last, for the blast of a war-horn came faintly upward to them from the Philistines in waiting, and aroused them to their office, "Samson, if you love your country and its people, will you let this our task be done: let us bind you and deliver you to the soldiers?"

"I will do it, yes. If you will swear to me, that none of you will injure me."

"As the Lord liveth, Samson, we will only bind you and deliver you to them. We will not think of harming you, much less of killing you."

"Very well, I trust to those who yet can swear by their father's God."

As he spoke, he descended and held out his hands to the bearers of the cords. These were new ropes, fresh made of the strong fibre of a palm-tree's bark. Enlaced like a tiger ensnared by a net, they led the surrendered champion down the declivity. The Philistines raised a shout of delight and condescended, so great was their glee, to thank the men they usually considered far beneath them. Their captains flocked around and taunted the defenceless one, and they formed, soldiers and officers on a level from the universal joy, one series of ring upon ring around the little centre where Sampson, corded more than securely, was the target for innumerable insults. His eyes were clear as ever, and they flashed at times as they swept around to find the author of some sneer or sarcasm that had struck home, but most of the time, they looked up over the smiling faces and shaking fists, at the clear sky. A smile played unvaryingly on his countenance.

"Ha, ha! Redeemer of the Israelites! hail, strong one less than a child! See him who shall die as died his wife! We'll have a brave flame of him on the very house of Timnath that we burnt her in!"

A shout of fiendish laughter received accessions from every throat. But, all at once, it hushed of itself, and the open lips that gave it vent, turned pale as the cheeks. Samson was still in the circle of the thousands, but he was free!

Yes, free! for at the putting forth of his strength, the new cords had become even weaker than threads of rotten wool, and he snapped the score of bands into halves.

To stoop, while they were speechless and motionless, and treat the lines around his legs in the same manner, was no difficult task, and he was free as he could wish. They shrank back from him, still without a sound, so potent was the awe that ruled them. Near by, within the clear spot and serving as a pedestal to several men to overlook the heads of those between them and the captain, was the skeleton of an ass, fallen dead on the road from exhaustion and rolled into the ditch to become bare bones. The metal-cased sandals of the soldiers had crushed nearly all the same left by the dogs and jackals, so that neither rib, thigh or leg-bone were left. But the thick jawbone was still there, grinning with the remaining teeth.

With the parted cords hanging to him yet, Samson strode to the ditch, his way being made as much by the terror he inspired as by the vigorous brunt of his broad breast. In a moment, he turned, the dried ditch behind him, the thousands of soldiers before him, and the jawbone in his grasp. At the sight of him confronting them, the overpowering dread vanished in part, and wholly at the sound of their own encouraging words.

A long spear was run forward at him, but he caught it with his left hand and quickened its impetus by the pull he gave it. The spearman was then brought to him under his left side. His right hand, armed only with the bone, descended on the steel cap of the soldier, who fell his whole length on the ground and into the ditch. The rotten, worm-eaten, and bleached bone had become as hard as a rock, and by its edge it had cloven the inch of iron and the spearman's skull. Samson dashed into the heart of the mass.

Those who could see, beheld this sight: A heaving sea of glittering metal in the forms of iron and brass helmets, sword blades, and spear heads, arrows and light darts; the

waves of it, which were each a furious man, converging towards the centre, where a man stood on an elevation. The elevation was corpses which he had slain, in his death-dealing hand was brandished, rose and fell and carried mortal strokes, no axe or club or mace but the simple jaw of the humble animal, no longer white with exposure but red with the blood it sprinkled round about as it flourished in the faces of the on-comers.

They urged forward one another by the names of their gods, he cried on his, and, more, he lifted up his voice so powerfully that the young men of Judah, fretting under the view of such a spectacle, picked up the weapons of dead Philistines and, forming a body increased every moment, began to cut their way to where the strong voice rose unwaveringly: "The Lord, the Lord shall avenge His people!"

Assailed in flank and separated, confounded at being dared by one man, the Philistines gave way. A thousand, and these their foremost, had bitten the blood-besprinkled dust. Samson, unwearied still, followed closely, the leader now of the men of Judah. But at length, in one of the changes of the fight, which left him alone, the weariness came over him. He was about to sit down, but, remembering himself, he knelt, and laying down the fatal bone, poured forth his thanks for the victory which had been permitted to be his. He was greatly tormented with thirst, so much so that, after fruitlessly seeking on the hot plain for a single vestige of moisture, he cried:

"Praise to the Lord, praise after praise, for having given the land such a deliverance by the means of two humble instruments. But I thirst, oh, God of a free people, once more; I am too exhausted to search for a pool or reach the forest. Am I to fall into the hands of the ungodly?"

His eyes, raised appealingly, fell and, in lowering, chanced

to alight on the bone cast aside. What was his surprise, what his gratitude when he saw, out of a little worm-hole in the bone, a drop of pure water force itself, a second followed and added itself to the first ; a third and a fourth till the globule ran, and next, the stream, growing from a tiny thread into a trickling rill, washed off the blood till white as lambs' wool again and undefiled, the jawbone glittered clearly in a flow of water. With thanks on his lips, Samson knelt and drank. It brought back to him more strength than he had spent.

The pursuers of the few Philistines returned spoil-laden and well-armed. They made Samson their leader. Tribe after tribe broke out into insurrection, and soon, instead of a subjected territory, a liberated land reared its defiant border against its late over-riders, the Philistines. Peace was on Israel now, and, when Samson was made the ruler the words of prophecy were fulfilled :

“ Dan shall judge his people.”

Samson was secretly within the hostile city of Gaza one night, when the intelligence of his stay reached the ears of his enemies. They were afraid to fall upon him in the darkness, which would be so much assistance to one man contending against many, and they determined to wait till daylight. To make sure, however, that he should not escape them during the night, they secured the gates of the town by the very strong bar of oak banded with iron, which they used only in time of war. But, in the middle of the night, the intended victim awoke and, thinking that he was endangering too much to try to leave the place in broad daylight, he resolved to take his departure at that late hour.

He found the walls too well guarded not to risk discovery, and a wound from a bow, and he went to the gates. They were fastened as he expected, but the bar was locked on the inside. Samson laughed to himself, for



with two pushes of his shoulders, he bore down before him, not the gates alone but the posts with them. He doubled the doors on one another, and shouldering all walked off with his charge. It was not till he was far away that he left them on a hill top.

Samson, as judge and chief over the Israelites, had had no time in the early and laborious portion of his rule, except for his many duties. But his heart, though so strong, was yet capable of love. How he had loved, we have seen.

In the valley of Sorek dwelt a woman of the name of Dalilah, who was famous for beauty. She was not equally known for goodness, and hence she listened to certain lords of the Philistines who visited her by stealth, with this proposition. She was to allure Samson, and when she should have won his affection, she was to find out how it was that he was strong above all other men. These nobles promised her, for that invaluable secret, each a thousand pieces of silver. She consented greedily.

For the better furtherance of her aims, she had the chance to attract Samson's attention, and gradually, by wicked wiles, she attached him rather strongly to her. One time, then, believing that she had him sufficiently in her power, she asked him that to which she had been tutored.

"It is no great wonder," said he laughing, "but like most wonders, simple to a fault. Instead of ropes or iron, if the silly ones could only think to use seven twists of green willow never dried, I could no more stir than a stone image."

This she tried, when he had fallen asleep and been found slumbering by her. The Philistines were waiting outside, but Dalilah, suspecting treachery because she was treacherous herself, advised their captains not to come in until she should give a signal. To try Samson, she called out in his ear :



"Samson, here are the Philistines!"

But he sprang up, and the green wood was broken by him like so many dried and brittle stalks. Dalilah, having been sure of this, forced a laugh, and told him that she had thought that he was only deceiving her. She insisted on knowing the truth, which he answered, was: he had only to be secured with new cords, which had never been used for any purpose whatever.

Again she found him sleeping and contrived to slip a new rope over his hands and feet. Again, too, she had recourse to her test, but, at the first call, he rose to his feet and cast off the bonds like so many burnt threads. To quiet her reproaches he assured her that, if the seven long locks of his luxuriant hair should be woven as a warp to the web, the charm would be destroyed that made him superhuman, and he would be even less than his fellow man.

She believed him, for she could place faith in charms and magic sooner than elevate her evil heart to understand that more than mortal gifts come only from the Giver of all good. When she had the opportunity, which was one afternoon when Samson had sunk into deep repose by a window, aided by her gentle fanning of him, she hastened to send off her servant for the Philistines, and to draw her loom up to the window. With great care she took up the long braids of the Israelite's hair, and—while he slumbered on unconsciously, his rest deepened by the hum of insects in the garden and fields of the valley and by the whirr of the loom—Dalilah wove into the weft the hair, noiselessly plying the shuttle. When he breathed hard or moved, she ceased to shoot the cross threads, and waited till he slept again. By fits and starts, her faithless works progressed until Samson's hair being netted in with the threads up to as near his head as she dared proceed, she concluded her end was achieved. To make herself sure,

she fastened the strange cloth down to the heavy frame by the roller.

She was about to call in the soldiers, who had arrived softly during her task and secreted themselves in the corridor, but she prudently thought of making the trial first. So she bent down to the ear of the slumbering man, and cried :

“Samson ! up, up ! the Philistines !”

At the call, Samson shook himself, like a lion surprised asleep by an arrow in his side, and tried to rise. But his entangled hairs at first drew him down. At the second attempt, nevertheless, though it was impossible for him to either break the immense quantity of his hair or to pull it loose from the cloth which it had been wedded to, he was on his feet. The cloth had drawn the pin that retained it to the beam out of its hole, and it hung now at his back. He accused her then of perfidiousness and went away. Not a man in the passage, many as they were, war-proof and well-armed, dared to reveal his presence as he went by them.

The lords accused Dalilah of not fulfilling their anticipations of the effect of her charms. She was sufficiently annoyed at her failure without their censures, and, growing angry she threatened to give up the part of traitress and seller of men. But, on their paying her some money in advance and on renewal of old promises and making of new ones, she agreed to a final essay.

She had no little pains to revive Samson's affection again, but she did succeed. As soon as she presumed to imperil her standing with him, she began as before :

“Samson, here's sixty times a day you declare you love me. And fifty times more you aver I do not love you. Why ? Merely because I sought to test your affection. Your heart is not mine ! Have I a secret from you ? Have I ever

deceived you once, as badly as you thrice have trifled with me? Oh, Samson, tell me truly, what makes you, loved as you are above all other men by me, stronger than any that are or have been."

"I am strong in faith in my Lord," said he solemnly.

"No, no, I do not mean that," said she quickly, for although she pretended not to place credence in a God, yet, as few are impenetrably hardened, the simple mention of the holy name wounded her. "No, no, in what rests your power? As you love me, tell me!"

She grew as fervent in her entreaties as he grew resolved in his determination, but, he had his moment of weakness. He found the woman nearer to him than the Omnipresent, he trusted in her rather than in Him who knows no deceit.

Strong as he was above his fellows, high as he was above them as a ruler, he fell; and as he was high and strong so he became weak and low beneath calculation.

"He said: "Would any make me powerless as a babe? Let me be shaven. For I have been a child unto God from infancy, a Nazarite. While His, we are never allowed to injure ourselves, and my hair is virgin of steel."

He dared not look up at the heaven which he had forgotten, or around on the beauties of nature, which pointed every one, from eye-pleasing flower to taste delighting fruit, to the Infinite Goodness, and he bowed his head. Tenderly, but falsely, soothingly but designedly, Dalilah guided his head to her lap. She talked in a low, lulling voice, and he slept. Quickly, the traitress seized the nearest object and flung it against the wall as the signal. The soldiers rushed in, but did so noiselessly. She whispered the instructions. Presently one of them with a sharp dagger, cut off the seven thick braids of the slumberer.

Then Dalilah sprang up, and clapped her hands, saying mockingly:

"Samson, Samson! here are the Philistines, indeed!"

The Israelite awoke. Around him was the force of armed men filling the room, Dalilah smiling in triumph, and all the faces glad. Samson raised his once terrible arms, but ten pair of hands were on them, and, strive as he would, pray as he would, he sighed to find he was but as other men. They bound him, and this time he was totally incapable of even straining the ligaments which would have easily broken at his first effort of other times. His captors had no sooner dragged him within their own territory, when uneasy at their triumph being so complete and afraid yet that they might be foiled by some unexpected exhibition of his perhaps only slumbering strength, they put out Samson's eyes. As soon as they had led him into Gaza, where the multitude flocked around to gaze at the gate-bearer powerless now, and to impede the joyful march, they fettered him with brass manacles and leg-bands, weightier and in greater number than ever a prisoner had been shackled with before.

Crushed down by his ponderous shackles, crushed down too, by the immensity of his guilt, for the Israelites had now lost their wise ruler of twenty years by his folly, Samson could only repent. As he did so heartily, little by little, his power returned to him, proportionably to the growth of his hair. By entreaties he procured the doves, the lamb, the cake, bread and oil for the Nazarite offering of penitence and, praying that they would be received from his dark cell and his chained hands no less gratefully than the free priest in the holy temple, he officiated over his own sacrifices. But the poor comfort of worshipping in his dungeon was soon denied him, for that his might was being restored again, his jailors discovered. He was made, instead of the double yoke of oxen previously employed, to move the great mill-stone and grind in the prison house.

His hair still grew and by degrees he kept regaining his force.

At the end of the year, there was a grand assemblage of high and low in the vast arena of the temple, which was open to the air above, for, so wide was its area, no beams could be found or none joined to be long enough to stretch across and hold up a roof. In the centre were the altars, on which whole animals were offered up to Dagon their chief god. It was a thanksgiving to him for the blessings they credited him with conferring during the past months. In their enumeration of the causes for rejoicing they did not forget the capture of Samson.

Loud and earnest were the shouts of the people to the image :

"Glory to you, matchless Dagon! you have delivered into our hands our enemy, the destroyer at whose door lie so many deaths of our mighty ones!"

In their mirth of heart, one lord proposed that Samson should be brought out and made to display his harmless strength for the amusement of all. The populace were overjoyed at the proposition and cheered its maker.

In the time it took to send to the jail, to have Samson detached from the rings in the wall, and, loaded with chains which sat lightly upon him now, be conducted there, it was done. The muscular figure, a little bowed by the fault which he had committed but grievously expiated, was before the circle of galleries, packed with the Philistines, his head erect and his poor, sightless sockets seeming to search for the heaven which they had not eyes to see. It was something, though, for him to feel the good Lord's sunlight come down the opening and seemingly warm smile upon him, glad to see him since so long, for he had been in darkness in his dungeon and in duskiness in the millroom, of which the air was dim with the dust of the



grinding. At his appearance, a thundering clamor broke out on the ground floors and the others.

"Samson, Samson! Welcome, oh, judge of Israel! welcome, great rebel! welcome, believer in a helpless God, oh, helpless man! Ha, ha! behold the wise man of Israel ensnared by a woman! behold the mighty man whom a score of archers mastered! Samson, bow to our invincible God!"

They were frantic, and the laughs and cries seemed as if they would know no stop. At length, however, silence was restored. They found entertainment in making Samson exhibit his power. They made him lift a whole pile of iron in bars, take a large man in each hand, though the men were accoutered for war and weighed no little breast and back plated; they made him do this and do that, till they tired of looking and gave him the rest which he did not need. Samson had been tempted to fling the weights he had sported with, into the thickest of the noisy throng, but he felt how little such a vengeance would be. Another idea seized him. He turned to the little boy who guided his steps, and begged him to take him to the main columns, against which he would like to lean and rest. It was done.

The Hebrew captive stood under the principal part of the building. The dignitaries of the land were clustering in the galleries above him. The main altars smoked in front. The common people were high above on the topmost tier, closely pressed. The priests were concluding the sacrifices before the gigantic image of the idol.

Samson groped with his hands, till he felt on each side of him, the huge rounded stone columns which were the capital pillars. While the multitude exhaled their breath in one deafening cry of acclamation to their God, Samson silently breathed his prayer.

"Oh, Lord God who once deigned to favor me, I pray



with all my heart and soul that thou wilt strengthen me this once, so that they may be punished, not for the wrongs and torments they have placed on me, but for their insults to thy Majesty!"

They were spending their voices yet in exclaiming: "Praise to Dagon, god of gods! praise to the only being who is worthy of all praise!" when, loudly as they vociferated, they heard a voice beneath them say:

"Let me die with these profane!"

Samson had embraced with either arm a pillar and irresistibly had hugged them towards his breast.

High above all other sounds, a sinister crackling proclaimed itself, an awful herald to an overwhelming crash. The columns were wrenched from their bases, the galleries bent there like a bow, and the planks and largest timbers began to warp. A scream arose from a thousand lips and some leaped over the topmost gallery to die upon the ground. The wood splintered and gave way in all directions, and a violent noise rose from the ground shaking with the fall. The floors, loaded as they were, had borne down their living freight inwards. The idol was split and dethroned and crushed its own priests by twos and threes in its descent. The altars had their hot coals scattered by flying beams, and the flames they kindled among the rubbish added a fresh terror to the scene of destruction. The immensity of the disaster seemed to silence the groans and shrieks for a moment. The dying, then, caught with their closing ears, this mournful chant of their late captive's triumph:

"Oh, God of my fathers, to thee the glory! Thanks to the God of Father Moses who sang: 'He will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries; He alone can deliver. Where are the gods they trusted, where is their rock!'"

It was Samson entombed by the largest heap of ruins, dying by the slow but sure pressure of the mass, but preserving his spirits to the last. The god of the Philistines had been cast down like their noblest and highest, and the few who escaped from the human hecatomb looked with fascinated though frightened eyes on the mounds of bristling wood, under which were buried three thousand dead, dying and wounded.

The family of Samson came and took him from the monument of devastation which he had caused. In the burying-place of his father, they placed the corpse of him who had liberated his country and judged it valiantly as wisely for twenty years, and who had slain more in the hour of his death than in all his life, stained by but few faults and they fully atoned for.

*SAMUEL.*

IN the village of Ramathaim-Zophim, on Mount Ephraim, there lived a man of certain wealth, who was named Elkanah. It was not wrong in those days for a man to have more than one wife, and this Elkanah had two, Hannah and Peninnah. The latter had children, but she was not content and thankful at that, but she used to boast and laugh and taunt Hannah, who, unable to bear so much tormenting, often fell to crying and mourning. Every year, Elkanah was wont to leave Ramathaim, and, with his family, travel to Shiloh, where the tabernacle of the Lord had at length rested under Joshua, and where there were feasts, with dancing and music in the worship yearly. The father took the different animals and goods he had brought along over the sandy roads, the basaltic rocky lands, and over the piney mountains on the backs of asses and one and two-humped camels, and divided them among his wife Peninnah and her children so that they could make their offerings at the holy place. He loved Hannah very much and to her he gave much more than to the others, but still she

was so teased and provoked by the other wife, that her throat was full of sobs and she could not eat a bit of whatever was set before her, however tempting, roast kid or baked, fine flour cakes or honey.

"Why are you weeping, Hannah?" her husband asked.

But she kept her head bowed down in her hands on her lap, and the tears were trickling through between her fingers.

"And you won't eat? Try, for you will make yourself ill. Don't be so sad all the time. Am I not, I the husband who loves you so, dearer to you than a dozen sons?"

Not liking to pain her husband any longer with her sorrowing, which she could not overcome, less than ever when she heard every moment the other wife's children playing around her and being kissed and kissing, Hannah left the table while they were finishing the meal of the evening, and went out in the streets, where she wandered till she came to the Temple of the Lord. There she sat herself down and her bitterness of spirit continuing, she felt that, as her grief (for His wise purposes) came from heaven alone, so the joy and relief she desired could also only be given by the Being so much more powerful than all the mightiest together of earth. So, while weeping bitterly, she said to herself that, if God would be so good to her as to remember she would do all she could in return, and, if she should have a darling little son given her, as soon as he could be parted from her, she would make him a servant of the gracious Giver all the days of his life.

Now, at the same time, Eli, who was the priest, was seated on a bench by the doorpost of the Temple, resting in the shadow and watching the going down of the bright sun on the plains. There were few passers-by at that hour, and he was not disturbed in his thoughts until a sob or two came to his ears. It was Hannah, weeping amid

her prayer. She was making her vow from her heart, though, and her words were not to be heard if her lips did move. The priest saw the motion of her lips and the rocking of her body and the movement of her arms, and he thought that she was some wretched creature who was drunk. He was shocked and ashamed that one who had so forgotten herself should have dared to come that near to the place sacred to worship, and, leaving his seat, he went over to her to chide her.

"Why, woman," said he sternly, "why have you taken to wine or strong drink, against all laws? Put away the wine from me."

She took her hands away from her reddened and tearful eyes, and held them out open to him.

"You may see, my lord," said she, "that I have nothing wrong on me. I am only a woman who has drunken deep of misery's cup. I have been pouring out my soul to the good Lord, good though I am in sadness by His will—good, for could He not have done many, many things to have added to my grief; death to my dear husband, great harm to myself. I was praying, sir, praying, that was all. I am not a naughty woman, or I would fear to pray before the Temple."

Eli saw she was speaking the truth for she met his eyes with the modest look, if bold in truthfulness, of hers tear-streaming, and said: "Go, with a heart in peace. May the God of Israel grant what thou asked of Him."

Thanking him, she turned away, much less saddened, and went home, where she found she could eat. Her husband was pleased that her face should wear a smile again. The next day, they all went back to their home by Mount Ephraim. A whole year past, when Hannah found that He to whom she had prayed had not forgotten her, for she was blessed with a little boy, to whom she gave the name of

*Samuel*, meaning, Asked of the Lord. Her husband and the rest of his family were about to start for the regular journey to Shiloh once more, and he asked her if she would not come to thank heaven for having listened to her and answered her. But she said no; she would wait till the little one was become strong enough to be taken on such a journey and her husband told her to do as she thought best, and, with a kiss on her cheek and on the baby's forehead, he mounted his camel and gave his men orders to begin the march of the caravan.

At last, little Samuel was large enough to bear the hardships of the road, and then, with his father and his mother, he was taken to Shiloh. They drove along with them three bullocks, and carried some flour and a leathern bottle of wine. When they arrived in the city, they killed one of the cattle and brought the child to Eli in the Temple.

"Do you remember me, my lord," Hannah asked the priest. "But it is so long ago. I am the poor woman whose grief you thought to be drunkenness. This is the child I prayed for; see him smile and clap his little hands at the glory of the tabernacle within—and he reaches out for your breast-plate so bright! Well, the good as great Lord has not forgotten me—I hasten to do my promise. Here, take the child I give to His holy house. And, see, if heaven has been so kind to me, and I so far from one of the best, who says he is too wicked to have hope. And shall not the good, those better than I, call trustingly on the Almighty?"

Eli took the child, then, and his mother went away with his father to their home. Little Samuel grew up, hearing holy words and seeing holy things from almost everybody that entered the Temple. The two sons of Eli, named Hophni and Phineas, alone were bad, and they were very much so. Not content with spending their time and more



and more deeply blackening the good name their father had given them, by sharing evil sports with the wicked young men and girls of the city, they felt no awe even when in the sacred building, and out of bravado, they used to make their servant take meat which the people brought to be sacrificed for them to eat themselves. If any of the people murmured against the wrong-doing, the servant would threaten to take it by force, and in this way, the sons of the priest frightened the faithful worshippers. But still, these, laying the blame to the Worshipped One instead of those who filled the place of His ministers so unworthily, grumbled and disliked to take cattle or bread or cake or fruit or any offering to the Temple so long as they were robbed of it.

Meanwhile, as Samuel grew up, his mother came every year, with his father, to see him, and she brought every time clothes she made herself for him to wear. Eli was pleased with the boy's good conduct, for he was always respectful to the old man and, as soon as he could run about, he was only too happy to go to the city for his needs or to save him any trouble. And Eli blessed Hannah and her husband and hoped they would be made happy with other children to replace that one they had given to the service of God. And heaven did bless them and Samuel had three brothers and two sisters to come to the city with his parents and see him in the hall of the congregation.

By this time Samuel was able to keep in the duties of the priesthood, and, wearing his linen ephod, he ministered before the altar. It was he who was busy morn and noon till dark, keeping bright the golden and silver ornaments of the tabernacle; the mercy-seat, the ark, the table and dishes, the candle-sticks and lamps, as well as dust with softest fleece the polished sweet-scented wood; and he

saw that the lamps were filled and ready every evening and dark days when the storm-clouds swept over the plains around the city ; and he folded up and put away with care the garments of the priests, with the chains and breast-plates and frontlets, which he took care should never be tarnished or dented ; and he held the water and the silver scraper and the little broom to clean the brass top of the perfumed wooden altar ; and the oil to anoint it afterward so that it should be holy for the next sacrifice ; and he often had the key and the charge of the inner room where were kept the pure oils and fine spices. And Samuel—though Eli's wicked sons looked at the rich work of precious metals and costly stone with the eyes of calculators as to their worth among men—Samuel never went among the sacred vessels or walked by the altar and regarded them otherwise than in reverence. He always felt that if the curiously carved and polished gold was bright yet the glory of Him they were offered to, was far, far more dazzling ; that the jewels were nothing to the lightnings of heaven for brilliancy ; that the valuable curtains of finest hair of goats, the silk and fine stuffs were trifles to the priceless gifts of God, health, happiness, peaceful heart. And every moment he thought of the kind Power who had given him little brothers to gladden his mother, parted from him, and little sisters to make her still more joyful, and whenever he saw by a doorway or by a window of the Temple, or when he was out of doors with the priest (called to settle some dispute of farmers about their fields), some boy of his own age taking the name of his Maker in vain, stoning for cruel sports a pigeon, crying after the lame, blind, or deformed, speaking shamefully to his parents, (too kind to give him over to punishment, badly as he acted), stealing grapes and other fruit and liquors and beginning to poison himself so early, or doing

any of the wicked deeds that are still to our day, Samuel would look up to the sky and sorrow, and he would wish he did not keep beside the priest so that he could run to the boy and speak to him to make him better.

Eli was growing old, for he was more than ninety, as Samuel grew up. People had been sorry to inform him how his sons were shamefully conducting themselves, but at last he heard of it, and he told them he knew now what they had been doing and were doing and he warned them, for, priest's sons as they were, their straying from the good path was a sin against heaven, and not merely against man. But Phineas and his brother laughed to themselves would not mind their old father, and went off into the city to be worse than ever, making their associates laugh with their jokes on the aged man.

Samuel comforted the priest and stayed in doors with him, and he was loved by all. Many were the farmers' wives and the farmers themselves, who made little presents to him of fruit and cakes, and those who lived in the country near his parents, in returning went out of their way to Elkanah's house to speak of their boy. A very good man one day came to tell Eli (for there was no Bible in those times and when the King of Heaven wished to tell his people anything, He chose good men to be His messengers) that God was displeased at his sons acting as they did. From father to son the priesthood went down, but the worship would be disgraced if it should fall at Eli's death unto such stained hands as his children's. The man told the priest further that both Phineas and Hophni would meet death the same day and that the last of Eli's race would be glad to beg bread of the faithful man whom heaven would select to take the priest's place.

Darkness came on one evening. All in the city slept, except the priest's sons and some noisy friends of theirs who were

riotously feasting in a stranger's tent near Shiloh, and the dew was falling on the parched sand, the naked rock and the fruitful soil that was tilled. Eli had lain down to sleep in his room of the Temple, and Samuel, saying his little prayer in the dusk, for the lamps were going out in the place, went also to bed, not in the least afraid there, after having entrusted himself to heaven, when a voice called out the boy's name.

"Here I am!" said he, springing up and running to Eli's room, for the old man could not see very well and had often to call for his help in the night.

But the priest was in slumber, and when he woke up, said, "No, he had not called. It must be some dream of youth. Go to bed again, Samuel."

The boy had hardly lain down once more than he was sure this time he was called, and he hurried to the priest only to be told, though, that he was mistaken again. And so a third time. But Eli had heard the voice and he knew whose it must be, and he told Samuel, if he again was named, to answer: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

As he was bade, he did, for the voice came still again, and as soon as he had answered: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," the voice continued, as he listened, kneeling on his bed: "The Lord who speaketh will do towards Eli and his what He has said. He did not keep his sons from evil—his house shall be punished, do what they may."

As soon as it was dawn, Samuel hastened to throw open the doors of the Temple and kept away from the priest, to whom he was afraid and disliked to tell what he had heard. But Eli called him to him, and begged him to tell what had passed and, when he heard it all, for Samuel hid nothing at all of it from him (for he was all truth), Eli bowed his

head and said: "It was the Lord who said this: his will be done."

From one end of the country settled by the Israelites to the other, every one believed in Samuel having been made a prophet of the Lord, who appeared to him more than once by His Word.

In a battle with the Philistines, the Israelites were defeated and to recover their losses, they could only think of taking the ark of the covenant from Shiloh and bearing it among the soldiers. But, though the enemy were at first afraid of the God who had worked such wonders to the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness after their flight from King Pharaoh, they charged the Israelites once more and not only put them to flight, but took the ark itself and killed the two sons of Eli. A man hastened to tell the priest all, and hardly had he imparted the bad news than Eli fell from his seat and broke his neck.

Meanwhile the victors had taken away their trophy and put it in the house of worship to their god Dagon, in Ashdod. In the morning they found that this statue had fallen forward before the ark. The next morning, for they replaced their idol, they found nothing but a stump left of it, for it was again overthrown and the head and hands cut off, so the priests and people were afraid to go into the hall. The Philistines were made sick, so that they were fain at length to cry out for the removal of the ark. It had been in idolators' hands seven months, during which they had had the plague horribly. The priests ordered that presents of gold should be put in the ark and that it should be taken back to the enemy. This was done, and the ark stayed twenty years at Kirjath-jearim, while the Israelites thought it was lost to them forever, and they took strange gods in the place of the true one. Samuel warned them and reproved them, and, on their destroying their idols, he prayed



that his countrymen would be spared from their late conquerors who were coming anew in full battle array, with many spears and arrows. The prayer was answered, for a great storm arose and overwhelmed the Philistines at the time of their enemy's charge, and they were pursued a great way. All the advantages they had won, were regained by the Israelites, who held Samuel in higher and higher esteem.

Samuel was getting old now, and he wished to have his sons, Joel and Abiah, judge the land in his place. They were not at all like him, for they took bribes and gave false sentences and did great harm to justice and people, so much so that Samuel was complained to, and the people desired to choose a king for Israel, like other nations had. It was in vain that he used all his wisdom to show them how a monarch would enslave them, and take everything good he wanted from whoever he pleased, and to point out to them the happiness they enjoyed as they were governed. They would have a king. And word came from Heaven to Samuel that he should let them have their own way, and be given a man like themselves to be over them, instead of the King who had been theirs so far. So the priest chose Saul, a young man of the tribe of Benjamin, the least of all the family of Israel, and he was made king.

For some time King Saul did well, but, after many battles, when sent to stay the Amalekites, he let his soldiers plunder, and Samuel reproved him for it, and told him that he would soon be no longer the sovereign. With that he left him, and they never met again. Samuel was told in a vision that among the sons of Jesse, a Bethlehemite, he would find the next king and, old as he was, he went there and chose Jesse's younger son, David, as the future sovereign. But, while David was scarcely of man's age, and Saul was still the Ruler, Samuel gave up to the God he had



so well served, from the days when he had been a little child before the altar to these of his old age, his pure and faithful spirit. With the many heavy lamentations he deserved, he was buried at his house at Ramah.

*DAVID.*

SAUL, who was king over Israel, having gone against all rules of good and of God, brought down upon him the heavenly anger, and Samuel the prophet was commanded by the King of Kings to make the new sovereign of him whom the Lord should choose.

David, the youngest of the eight children of Jesse, who dwelt at Bethlehem, was keeping the sheep as was his daily duty, and playing to solace his loneliness on the rude harp of those days, on whose strings he was skillful, from so much practice, when he was called to his father. He had been thought unworthy from his youth, to be presented to the venerable Samuel, who had come and asked to see Jesse's family, and had been therefore left in the pasture.

He stood before the prophet. The latter erect but with the weight of many years of pious labor upon him, his snowy beard long, his hands and face wrinkled, and a slight trembling on his whole frame ; the other, round-faced and ruddy with health and the chasing the sheep in the open air.

In the midst of the boys, eight brothers, and their father, Samuel took the transparent horn in which was the oil, (with some of which he had anointed Saul,) and put a few drops on the boy's head and proclaimed him the Lord's anointed.

It was after this that Saul was dispirited, and to such a degree that his own servants noticed it, and proposed that he should let himself be cheered up by singing and other music. They told him that the youngest son of Jesse was a very fine player on the harp, besides being a handsome youth highly fit for a royal chamber. The king hastened to send off messengers to Bethlehem. And not only did Jesse let his son go, but he sent along with him an ass carrying fine bread, and a leathern bottle of wine, and a fine kid, as presents to the sovereign. Saul was greatly charmed by the boy's appearance, and was still more delighted with him when his playing on his harp acted like magic to drive away the fits of despondency which naturally seized the monarch who had forgotten the God who had lifted him from the common herd and placed him on the throne. He made him one of his armor-bearers, for the king having the most precious life, necessarily wore the heaviest and strongest mail and, not to fatigue him, the helmet, shield, breast and back-plate would be carried by servants until the very moment when they were actually needed.

But Saul was gathering most of the available men of his realm to resent the invasion of the Philistines, whose camps were already on Judean soil, and among his forces were the three eldest sons of Jesse. David thought so many enough from his father's family, and he renounced his high position to return to his father. He was at home, while the others were soldiers confronting the enemy at Elah. Jesse ordered the boy, for his sons had been in the field some forty days and the system of provisioning an army was very ill-cared for in those ancient times, to pack up some parched corn, with a dozen loaves, and carry them to the soldiers his brothers, and bring back their receipt for them, and a report as to how they fared, as well as to give ten

cheeses he took also to their captain to make him attentive to them in the camp life.

The boy started the first thing in the morning with his burden and went as far as the valley where the troops were already in motion to fall upon one another, nothing scarcely but hand-to-hand fighting being the mode. David hurried to pass among the companies in motion and join his brothers. He was talking with them, exchanging news of home for the war news, when there was a great trembling among the Israelites and they all but broke and ran, although the Philistines were yet at a distance, and but one man came out in advance of their gleaming line of spears and swords.

But this was a man, indeed. More than nine feet high, broad shouldered and strong in proportion, he might well cause terror. He glittered from head to foot in heavy brazen plates, and his shield was as much as one man could lift and carry before him. He had a long and weighty spear in his huge grasp, tipped with iron, and he brandished it to terrify the shrinking Israelites. Every day for a couple of weeks this soldier had presented himself thus and loudly called himself the champion of his countrymen and offered to fight any single man of the enemy, the victor to decide the fate of all the thousands.

There he stood before them now, crying out :

"I am Goliath of Gath, and defy your whole army. Choose your man and send him out against me."

"Who is this man who dares defy the followers of the ever-living God?" asked David of those around him.

"You hear him boast of his name. He has come out in this way day after day, but no one of us can venture against the giant. Would I could, for the king will enrich whoever vanquishes him and free him of taxes for all time forth."

"And do you let him, this Philistine who worships sticks and stones, daily thus insult you?" cried David, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"Do you know, young sheep," said Eliab, David's eldest brother, who was angry at the boy's words, "do you know there are brave captains and brave men here around you. Were the killing of this huge man of Gath a matter easy to be done by a common man, would he shake his spear big as a weaver's beam now in our faces? Go back to your handful of sheep in the wilderness, and do not presume to say your presumptuous say before men. I know how proud you are since Samuel the old prophet sprinkled you with the oil, but let us have none of that pride here which ill became you at home. Return, for you and your like are not fit even to look on a battle. You are not wanted here."

"What have I done?" answered David mildly. "When so many of you show alarm for one man, may I not, I who am afraid never of evil and evil men, may I not be wanted?"

He turned away from his brother and tried to encourage the other soldiers, and his bold talk ran round to every ear till it came even to King Saul's, who sent for him.

"My king, may I take another's place and go out to meet this loud-voiced, defiant Goliath?" asked David calmly.

"You? You, my child, are in no wise able to fight that Philistine, you are only a boy and have been brought up in peace. He has been a soldier from his youth up and is famous as a strong and active man, skilled and hardy."

"My lord the king," said David firm in his purpose, "I was tending my father's sheep one day, when I heard a dreadful growl in the woods, and, with shaggy coat all bristling and long teeth gnashing with famine, a huge bear sprang over the rivulet and in three leaps over the pasture

grass, caught hold of one of the sheep from the midst of the frightened flock. I sprang upon him with my staff and beat him so that, howling and relinquishing the poor dead sheep, he was glad to fly back, unsatisfied and with barely the taste of the blood of his prey on his jaws, into the forest. And again, I was with my flock, when my dogs began to growl and spring up and bark. A lion with long mane standing on end, with grinding fangs and lolling tongue, with every claw and sinew and muscle set in action, launched himself into the fold. With a stroke of his paws he broke the back of one of my brave dogs and the other, torn with a second blow, would not approach him a second time. I was not afraid, then, but I rushed upon him, though he had a lamb in his frightful jaws, and struck him about the head till my staff was broken and he had dropped the prey. He turned on me in fury, and I, with my knife, stood with firm foot for him, I caught him by the very beard with this, my left hand, and with my right I stabbed and stabbed till his hot breath failing as I chanced to penetrate his eyes he fell dead at my feet.

The king looked on the animated countenance of the youth, so truthful, too, and was more confident.

"The Giver of my life," said David hopefully, "who preserved it from the lion and the bear, may think it well still to shield it, when I risk it against this idolater and defiant Philistine. He shall fall in the struggle as fell the wild beasts."

"Go," said Saul, "the Lord be with you. But let us take all our precautions, too. For he is foolish who sets all the burden on Him he prays to and does nothing himself."

His own armor Saul ordered to be put on David and he himself put on the helmet. David took up the king's sword and buckled it on, but, so weighty was the metal on him, that he could hardly stir or lift his hand up to his head.



He had to take off the protection, saying he was unaccustomed to be hampered in any way and that such defences would only be his ruin. He went out of the royal tent, and going to the nearest brook, he picked up carefully half a dozen choice pebbles which he put in the bag slung by its strap of goat's leather over his shoulder. His sling was in one hand, and his walking pole in the other. In this simple array, to the surprise of some, to the scoffs and pity of others of his countrymen, he left the friendly line and strode out with his youthful, elastic step towards the colossus in advance of the foe.

The latter, with his shield-bearer, amid the laughter of his comrades, stepped forward at the same time. But when the huge soldier came near enough to make out what manner of an antagonist was coming against him, he, too, burst into a fierce laugh, full of scorn.

"Am I a dog that a baby shakes a stick at me," said he in indignation. "Are the men of Israel only fit to have a child be in their stead?"

He cursed the boy in the name of his gods, and, with many a horrid oath, shouted in his strong voice :

"Come to me, and I'll give your tender flesh to the crows and the hyenas! Come on!"

But David was no wise daunted.

"You come to me," said he, "with sword, spear and shield, and great strength, but I am but a weak youth who am strong alone in the great favor of the almighty God, who is my weapon and defence. To prove there is a great Commander of our hosts, you will die this day by my hand, and on you, champion of the unbelieving Philistines, will the birds and beasts make their meals. The greater you, the greater your fall, and both armies shall see that the Lord needs no weapon of man, but by His invisible hand sends death to whomsoever He wills."

The giant had scarcely listened to so long a speech in patience, and hardly were the last words spoken than he strode forward in all his power. But David, while putting his hand in his pouch, walked swiftly towards him, to the astonishment of both hosts, who watched in silence, except sighs of pity from the Israelites and smothered laughs of anticipated triumph to their champion from the Philistines.

David had drawn one of the stones from his bag and fitted it in his sling. It whistled in the air, and, passing over the space between, in an instant flew over the Philistine shield-bearer's head and lodged itself in the forehead of Goliath crashing through the bones. The giant groaned, his spear fell from his hand, and, turning half, he fell forward on his face on the grass, never to move again. The ground was still shaking with his heavy fall, as the victor ran to the spot. The shield-bearer, in alarm, flung aside the buckler, and, casting one hasty glance at his bleeding master, took to flight to find refuge among his friends.

The shepherd-boy did not pursue him, but stopped by the fallen champion. He stooped and tore from its long scabbard the large sword, and, swinging it round, brought its edge down with all his force on Goliath's neck, and the shaggy head rolled off bleeding at the cut as well as at the other wound.

At the sight of the blood gushing from the trunk like a stream from a rock, the Philistines were dismayed and fled, their speed quickened by the cheer of victory and exultation that the Israelites set up, as, weapon in hand, they rushed after the fugitives. The routed were hunted out of the territory they had invaded, and all their camp equipage and spoil fell into the conquerors' hands. Foremost among the Israelites in the pursuit, was Jonathan, the king's son, and he greatly distinguished himself by his

vigorous wielding of his sword. When he returned he met David who was carrying the head of Goliath. He conversed with him and as the prince was fond of valiant men, and as he had already been prepossessed with the shepherd-boy, from having heard him tell the story of the lion and the bear, he conceived a great liking for the youth. And he went with him before his father the king.

Saul, for this great act, would not let David go home again and he appointed him to a captainship in the sight of all the army and the royal household.

As the victors came back, they were met by their wives and families, who sang and danced for joy, playing on pipes, harps and tamborines, and one of their chants ran: "Hail to Saul who has slain thousands of our insulters, and hail to David who has slain his tens of thousands!" This annoyed and even angered the monarch for he saw there was more praise given to the shepherd-boy than to him, and, the first flush of his gratitude to David being over, he began to hate him.

On the other hand, Prince Jonathan's liking turned into love for the Philistine's slayer, and he could not do too much to evince his affection. He gave David a full suit of his own garments, with his sword, belt, and bow.

With his envy and jealousy, the fits of madness to which Saul was subject, returned, and in one of them, on the very next day, he twice hurled his javelin at David, whose nimbleness only enabled him to escape being pinned to the wall, as the King intended. Thus failing in his intent, Saul in turn grew afraid of the youth, and, for fear he might kill him and try to become ruler in his stead, he dared not let him be any longer near his person, and—afraid, too, to degrade or punish the people's favourite—he ordered David to be commander of the troops which served over the borders.

David was wise with the beginning of wisdom, that is : the knowledge of God's endless goodness and greatness. And, hence, he did his duty to those soldiers under him and to the people who had dealings with him, and gained the esteem and even the love of all, old and young, throughout the nation. This made the king's hatred of him all the stronger and he plotted to work his ruin. He sent one of his attendants to him, therefore, who, asking a private interview of David, told him :

"Captain, our royal master loves you, as do all his servants. His daughter Michal loves you, too, but with all a woman's love. Why not speak out, captain. The king cannot refuse her to one who has saved the country, as you have."

But David shook his head, and answered :

"My friend, I am a humble man. What is my father's family that I should dare propose to a princess. Is it a small matter to be the spouse of a daughter of the royal house? I am poor, and have no riches to blot out my lack of greatness."

With this the servant went back to the king, who bade him return to say : "The king is willing to give his daughter to the brave captain. He asks no dowry from him, but himself. Let him go out with a force, however, and slay a hundred Philistines, and avenge the God they insult."

Saul thought and hoped that the young warrior would be killed in the action. But David, praying as he always did, for him to be spared in the struggle by the divine mercy, if he were doing holy work, put himself at the head of an armed body and, meeting a large band of the Philistines on the border, he killed full two hundred of them. This gained for the young commander not only a wife in the Princess Michal, but still greater eminence in the people's opinion, while it increased Saul's ill will.

Saul ordered his servants and his son Jonathan, who was there, to kill David wherever they should meet him, but the prince reproached his father and persuaded him to give over the wicked purpose and restore the victor of Goliath to favor. And, as a new war was on the eve of breaking out and such an assassination might weaken the king's power, the latter relinquished his design for the present.

In this new campaign, David enlarged his reputation as a warrior still more, for wherever he led, victory settled, and the enemy were nowhere successful against him. It was when the rejoicings were at their height, and as a fit of madness was again swaying the sovereign, that he, seeing David before him, and playing with his javelin in his hand, aimed it at him and flung it. Expert as he was, he this third time missed, and the steel head of the missile only penetrated the wall.

That night David escaped from the city and went secretly to his house.

But Saul, in his cunning, had foreseen the intention and he hurried off a number of men who were to watch the house and despatch him whenever he should leave it. Michal espied them lurking about, and she watched them. She hastened to tell her husband, and, being fearful that they might break into the house, in which case there would have been no safety for him, she said she had found one window which they did not appear to be watching, and induced him to climb out of it and continue his flight. Tired of waiting, and wishing to be sure they had their prey yet within their nets, several of them asked admittance as they had orders from the king to deliver to her husband David. Michal told them he was asleep and ill, but, as they would not believe her, she, after a delay, led them to the sleeping-chamber, where, on the bed, she had dressed up a figure out of a pillow, which they fancied to



be the commander in slumber. This news, that David was abed with sickness and might be long kept in the house they sent off to their master.

His wrath had not abated, for he came himself in answer, with more men, and he burst into the house, demanding to be shown the supposed sick man. The swords of his train went into the pillow only.

"Why have you, Michal," said Saul, "let my enemy go?"

"He is my husband, and he goes and comes as he wills. And he would have struck me dead if I had tried to stop him. And could I who know how much he has done for you and our country believe you meant harm to him?"

Meanwhile David had reached Ramah, where he lived with Samuel, the prophet who had anointed him. The men sent by the king after him there, were unable to execute murder in the holy man's presence. When king Saul in person came that way, David fled and retraced his steps secretly and had a meeting with Prince Jonathan, who made an agreement with him as to how they should meet three days after the next, Jonathan meanwhile to do all he could to soften his father's heart and to report his success at that time.

They swore faithfulness to one another.

David hid himself in the fields.

The next day was that of the new moon. There was a banquet in the royal chamber, and all the nobles were there around the monarch, except David, whose place was empty. Saul made no remark on the absence until the next day when he asked where was Jesse's son. Jonathan answered that David had gone away to his own home, where his family were feasting.

The king started up in rage, and he shook his clenched hand at his son.

"Oh, Jonathan, that you should speak well of him who



will be the downfall of our house. He is to succeed to your hurt, do you know it? Go, go, and have him seized. Surely he shall die!"

"But, father, what has he done? why should he, the Savior of the nation, meet death?"

Infuriated, the king caught up his javelin, and threatened his son as he had threatened David with it. As fiery, too, Jonathan sprang up, and left the table, eating nothing that day in his grief.

In the morning, at the hour appointed with David, the prince, with a little page with him, went out into the open ground. He had a bow and arrows with him, and he shot three so that they stuck in the ground and fell among the grass near a great stone, behind which David was concealed. The boy ran to pick up the arrows, when Jonathan called out, really to David, but apparently to the page:

"Are they not farther on. Make haste, go!"

The boy picked up the darts and returned, while David, who knew by this signal that all hope of being friends again with Saul was lost, fell on his knees to pray behind the rock. Then the prince gave the page his bow and quiver, and sent him to the palace with them, while he carefully went to meet his friend, and tell him the worst. They wept together, and with a last embrace, separated, Jonathan returning to the city; David, by secret ways, making all speed to reach a cave near his old home at Bethlehem, where his father and his relations came to see him.

There he stayed, and there flocked to him many who were poor, afraid of their cruel creditors, and unhappy at home, asking him to be their head, till he became a captain of some four hundred men. His family, whom he was in fear would suffer if they fell into King Saul's hands, he left in charge of the King of Moab, in his realm, while he and his band took refuge in the Wood of Hareth.

When David was in his wanderings, he had been sheltered and fed by a priest in the city of Nob, who had also given him, for he had fled in too much haste to have brought his arms, the sword of Goliath of Gath, which was placed as a trophy in the temple, and this David wore. Doeg, the chief herdsman of the royal household, had chanced to see the priest offer this hospitality, and he told Saul. The king summoned not, only the priest himself before him, but all his relations and, though they said they did not know that David was then an enemy to their king, Saul nevertheless ordered their deaths. Doeg and his men slew eighty-five of the priesthood and made an assault on the city of the priests and put the citizens to the sword. One of the high priest's sons escaped and brought David this news.

Other news came to David to the effect that the Philistines had made another inroad and were besieging Keilah and robbing all the small farmers outside the place of their grain. David mustered his force, which was nearly six hundred strong now, and marched thither. He surprised the enemy, who were only on the alert against the royal troops, and inflicted severe punishment on them, beside securing all the beasts of burden they had laden with the spoil. The grateful people of Keilah invited David to rest among them.

Saul was informed that his foeman was in that walled place and he hurried with a force to surround him and capture him. But David, who had reason to believe that the people of Keilah, who were too cowardly to beat off the Philistines plundering their farms, would hardly oppose the king, slipped out of town with his six hundred and took to the mountains.

Saul, foiled as to taking him in the town, had him pursued but could never overtake him in the fastness of the

heights. While in these woods, Jonathan had a meeting with his friend, and he encouraged him to continue his holy rebellion. At last, the mountaineers offered to sell the secret of David's hiding-place to the king, and they were guiding his forces to the spot when urgent news called off the royal troops, the Philistines—finding the frontier unguarded—having penetrated again. When he returned from his pursuit of them, David was in the Desert of Engedi, whither Saul hastened with three thousand picked men, meaning to search every bush and rock but he would find his enemy.

It happened that the king went into a cave all alone, and fell asleep, so that David, who was hiding in that very same underground retreat, was urged by his men to take the life of him who so hunted him. David did go softly up to the sleeping man, and drew his dagger, but it was only to cut off the flowing skirt of his robe. This done, he returned to his men, quieted them and prevented them from falling upon the slumberer, saying it was a crime to harm the Lord's anointed. In time, Saul awoke and hurried to join his friends, who were no doubt seeking him.

He had hardly left the cavern, than David ran after and called him, and when he turned, thinking it was an attendant in search of him, he bowed and said: "My lord the King, why will you listen to the people who say I, David, am thirsty for your blood? This very moment, heaven has placed you under my hand in this cave, and some of my men wanted me to take advantage of the golden opportunity, saying I should obey Tubal Cain's proverb and strike while the metal was hot. But I could not, I would not bring myself to injure my lord, who is the Lord's anointed. See, see, here in my hand is the silken skirt of your robe. The sharp steel that sundered it might just as easily

have traveled the road to your life. But in this, see that my hand is no murderous one and that I am guiltless towards you. Will you hunt me still like a deer?"

And he displayed the cloth he had cut.

"Is that your voice, my son David?" said Saul relenting, and even tearful. "Yes, you are far more righteous than I, for you have repaid evil with good. I see that heaven destines you as a worthier tenant of my throne. Swear only to me that you will not slay all my descendants."

David took the oath, and Saul drew off his forces.

But the king was not the man to let a good thought have a long, lasting impression on him, and, when tempted one day by the mountaineers, who came to say it would be easy to capture David in Ziph, he hurried with a large force and encamped around a hill in the Desert of Ziph, for they had arrived there at too late an hour for anything to be done that night. But David's scouts had seen the foe, and had brought him intelligence of it. In the dark, then, David chose one of his best lieutenants, and—calculating correctly that the royal troops would be too wearied with their long march in the hot sun, not to sleep well in the coolness—the two passed the sentinels fast asleep leaning on their spears, went by the slumbering soldiers and reached the centre of the camp where lay the king with Abner the commander of the army near him.

David's companion plucked Saul's spear out of the ground beside him and poised it, looking on his leader inquiringly.

"See, captain," said he, "the Lord who before placed him in your power, here does so again. Shall I pierce him through and through with his own lance?"

"Stay—no!" cried David. "Let no one touch the Lord's anointed. He alone who set him above us, should deal the

death blow. But carry the spear," added David, and he stooped and picked up the king's drinking-bottle.

They stole away as they had come, unseen, David looking in vain over the silent camp for his friend the prince, who was not with the forces. The two reached, unsuspected, the top of a high hill overlooking the encampment.

David shouted loudly : " Abner, Abner, I say !"

The general was awakened.

" Who calls ?" answered he.

David cried, so that the royalists all heard him. " Abner, you are an old soldier unequalled in Israel, and for that you are the king's special guard, but you let men come to the king's very side and remove his own spear and water-bottle. See !"

And he shook the bottle and his companion brandished the spear in the gloom, which was not so dense but that the startled enemy could discern their outlines.

Saul knew the voice, and he called : " Is not that my son David, who speaks ?"

" Yes, my lord. Oh, why do you run down your servant as the swiftly-mounted do the ostrich, as the wolf the lamb ?"

" I have sinned, I have broken my promise, I know," said King Saul, " but come back, my son David, and trust me again. I will never more even wish you ill, for you have still again been generous to me."

" Here is the spear that I kept from your breast—send one of your followers for it."

The goods returned, they parted, the outlaw and the king. But David could not trust the faithless monarch, and he dared not disband his men and give himself to his ruler. He went into the hostile country to King Achish of Gath, who gave him a town to inhabit with his men.



There he lived more than a year, fighting and spoiling enemies, but telling King Achish that it was his own countrymen that he had the conflicts with. This made Achish glad in the idea that David could not return to his friends after these attacks on them, and would have to be his servant forever.

By this time, the war began again, and great masses of both Philistines and Israelites faced one another. King Achish had David and his followers among his train, but the other Philistine princes, recognizing David as he who had so defeated them in former times, would not let him form any part of their forces for fear he and his would turn traitors during the fight. So he had to return to his home at Ziklag.

On the third morning, the scouts descried a dark speck on the horizon which enlarged by noon into a column which seemed to be smoke. With fearful hearts David's men quickened their pace and, when they reached what had been their happy homes, they found the town destroyed with fire, and deserted. Wives, sons, mothers, and daughters, all were gone. At so universal a loss they fell on their knees and burst into tears, grim and war-worn soldiers as they were, and they were enraged against David for having taken them away from those they loved and ought to have protected from the unknown fate that had befallen them. But David, though all dear to him were also gone, prayed, and begged them to be trusting in God, trying to assure them that He permits no evil to the good save for His glory and to test their faith. And to lose no time, he collected all, and started in chase.

The unknown persons who had done the mischief were so numerous as to have left a broad track easily followed. At such a quick pace did they, burning with eagerness to come up with the robbers, go that a third of them were



tired out, and, broken with grief as well, they had to halt at a brookside. The other four hundred had not gone far before they came upon a young stranger who was found all but lifeless in a field, and he was led to David. They had to feed him and give him to drink, for he made signs that he had been hungry and in thirst for three days and nights.

On being questioned, he replied that was a young Egyptian bondman to an Amalekite, a whole band of whom had scoured the border land of Judea and, on reaching Ziklag as the end of their inroad, burnt and pillaged it. And he offered if his life was spared and they would not let his master have him again, he would be only too glad to be revenged in guiding them to his late superiors. For, on his falling sick, three days previously, his master had said they could not be burdened with Egyptian dogs in their flight and there he had been left to perish in the sun and dews. David assured him of his life, and others fiercely growled that he might be sure his master would have no more slaves, if he should lead them to him.

The Egyptian was a faithful pilot. He conducted the party of avengers to where the robbers were halted to feast on the great booty they gained from both Israelites and Philistines. At the height of their festivity, their singing, dancing and drinking, the men of David rushed upon them, and left hardly one. Everything that had been taken from Ziklag, living and dead, was recovered, over and above many other things. There was such a superabundance that David sent a great many valuables to the chief men of the different tribes of Judah, his countrymen and friends, and to those who had sheltered him when he was so hunted from spot to spot.

During this time, the Philistines had had a great strife with their enemy, and had been the conquerors, and pursued the routed Israelites closely, killing three of Saul's

sons, among the press. Saul himself was wounded in the joints of his armor by arrows, and, for fear that the foe would have him prisoner and shame him by bearing him caged through their cities, he—finding none of his friends would do so—held out his sword before him and, falling on it, died thus transfixed. The vanquishers cut off his head, took his armor and his body, and bore all away with them along with his sons' corpses, to put his head on show in their country, to hang his armor up in their gods' house, and to fasten his and his sons' trunks to the walls of Bethshan.

The panic among the Israelites spread from the defeated army to the inhabitants of distant parts from the battlefield and all were in fear. Not all, for a handful of valiant men got together and, in the night, went to Bethshan and removed the bodies of their monarch and the dear ones fallen.

It was not long after this battle, that David, who was not long returned successful to Ziklag, heard of it, and it caused the greatest mourning to him and his followers. He grieved above all for his dear friend Jonathan, whose love for him had been so wonderfully pure and strong. He passed his orders, and all the more readily from the blackened ruins of their homes being no pleasant sight—all his command started for Hebron of Judah, where, not only were the downcast people too glad to receive a reinforcement of men so experienced in warfare, but they did more: they made David King of Judah.

The general of Saul's army, however, had escaped and he—who was that Abner whom David had taunted on his poor guard before all the army on the hill—made Saul's son Ishbosheth King of Israel, over which he reigned two years. Abner was defeated in a skirmish with David's followers, (which began a great war between him and the

supporters of Saul's house) and was slain long after, by a brother of a man he had killed in that skirmish. Two wicked brothers, judging others by themselves, thought they would gain much for themselves by assassinating King Ishbosheth. They did stab him, and brought his head to David. But he, in horror and in indignation, was enraged against such atrocious murderers, and he ordered them to be executed, as was done.

All the tribes of Israel came and made David the king, so that he was without a contestant in the realm. For a long time, he reigned, and, all the while that he did what was right, he and his kingdom was blessed. But amid so much prosperity, he was unable to preserve the pure heart which had preserved him up to then, and his punishment thus came on him.

His most-loved son Absalom, more handsome than well-behaved unfortunately, began to work against his father, commencing his sedition by winning the hearts of every man with whom he came in contact. At the time when he left the palace of his father to begin the outbreak against him, so many were on his side that there was no hope of King David resisting the rebellion. Flight was the only safety for the monarch.

There were hundreds who loved him who were eager to go with him, but he refused their company. It was enough that he should bear the annoyance and pains of so hasty a departure. But, for all that, by the time he had crossed the River Jordan, he had quite a force with him, composed in the most part of his old soldiers, hardy men of war.

The army of the rebels was greatly superior in number and it was headed by the new King Absalom. They brought the dethroned monarch to bay near the house of Manahaim. The loyalists held that place, and their centre

and left wing was in the outskirts of the Forest of Ephraim. At early dawn, they were attacked by the right wing of the rebels, who tried to clear the woods and reach the open ground before the city.

At the first shouts and the sounds of battle ringing over the trees and coming to the ears of the commanders at the town, King David announcing his intention of advancing in person with the party going to support the slingers and archers skirmishing under the cedars. But the commanders would not agree to that.

"No, no," said Joab and his brother, each general of a division. "If we are beaten, they will not care to pursue us hotly. If we die, who cares for us, old dogs of war? But you are worth two thousand to the cause. Stay in the city, my lord the King. You will be a tower of strength to whoever is left."

"As you say, let it be," replied David, standing by the gate and reviewing the supporting columns defiling towards the unilluminated horizon.

As they passed, spearmen, bowmen, horsemen, footmen, they shouted for their king, and amid their rejoicing, more than one brow darkened and the sword was gripped fiercely as they swore that the unnatural son should be made to suffer for so paining a father and so injuring the country. This reached the king's ears from two or three parties, and he hastened to say loudly to his generals, loudly enough for the passing files to hear:

"Remember, sirs, and soldiers, to deal gently with the young rebel. For my sake do no harm to Absalom."

Meanwhile, the rebels, full of the idea that their numbers made them irresistible, had driven back their enemy on the extreme right, but they began to be entangled in the wood, and had to call a halt two or three times, and wait for reinforcements. It was about noon when two-thirds

of their serried and long line were well in among the trees and thickets. The darkness and the fact of the ground being unknown to them, were greatly in favor of the loyalists, who had well studied the landmarks since they had come to Manahaim. Most of Absalom's forces were light troops, whose arms were javelins, slings and bows, and these could be but little used in among the oaks and cedars, whose entangled arms blotted out views of the sky above. The men under Joab, his brother and David's other general Ittai, were veterans accustomed to the short sword and heavy lance.

By wading through a broad pond and floundering over a morass around it, which had been deemed impassible by Absalom's leaders, Joab led a strong picked body of two thousand swordsmen, and three hundred with spears, directly between the main body and the right wing of the rebels. At the signal given by blasts of goatherds' horns they fell upon the flank of the pretender's own guards.

Taken by surprise, pulled off their steeds and stabbed to death while dragged to the ground, confused at finding their lines entered before they had suspected an enemy to be near them, many were slaughtered before a few had presence of mind enough to rally around Absalom. Hurling their light darts on the assailants, they tried to carry off their chief towards the guard of their camp equipage, but Cushie had already led off nearly five hundred young men and ran thither. They turned back, met Joab again in the wood and stood.

While they were maintaining the best and stoutest front they could, a lieutenant in Absalom's guard, who mounted a mule of great swiftness, proposed that his master should change helmet and horse with him, and try to join the left wing and the remains of the centre, seeming to be sturdily advancing under Amaza the commander-in-chief



of the disloyal. They hurriedly made the transfer, and Absalom, with the guardsman's helmet on his head and the guardsman's fast mule under him, dug his sharp-heeled sandals into the animal and rode off.

At the same moment, Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, and Phumah, nephew of Ittai the Gittite (who had vowed a vow that morning to out-do one another in the battle) charged the band of rebels sword in hand, some fifty reckless young men like themselves along with them. A score of them fell, pinned to the earth or to trees by javelins, but the rest cut openings through the foemen's front line. While cutting with their broad blades at the bucklers of bullhide, brass and iron scales, and at the weapons bristling against them, the guardsman wearing Absalom's golden-thread tunic and gilt metal cap, was foremost in striking at them. Phumah fancied he was some eminent leader in such attire, and he doubled his exertions to reach him and tear him from his saddle. But the lieutenant, wielding an axe, which the skirmishers had had to employ in marching through the thicket, and which he had picked up to replace his broken sword, dealt the Gittite two such cuts on the shoulder that, not dead, though his collar-bone was broken, Phumah sank to the ground in agony. At the same moment that a spearman put him out of pain, Ahimaaz sprang like a tiger on his slayer, stood on his own stirrup, grappled him and—holding his hands and the blood-dripping axe out of harm's way, passed his broad sword between his gorget and the top of his breast-plate so that, after piercing his throat, the point scratched the back plate. Choking with blood, the lieutenant fell from the pretender's horse.

The victor fancied it was Absalom himself who had thus fallen, but only for a moment for Joab and others knew the prince too well to be deceived.

During this while, Absalom, only guided by the sounds



of the action which changed in place and loudness every instant, had wandered out of the path, scarcely perceptible. The mule, already frightened by the horrid noises all around—the shrieks of wounded, the cries for quarter, the groans and moans, the fierce shouts of the chargers and the defiant response of the charged, the whinnying of horses, the whistle of missiles, the crash of penetrated undergrowth—moved fitfully and started at every gnarled trunk in the way. Every now and then, anxious at not having reached his friends, and fearful that stragglers from hostile bands might chance upon him at any moment, Absalom reined in, and listened and looked. In one of these pauses, he heard a rushing through the brush. He believed it was his friends who came, but prudently wheeled around so as to flee if the worst should be what came.

A score of fierce faces, besmeared with blood as much from the fight as from the briars, appeared, with eyes glistening with the light of battle, amid the tangled creepers of a wild grape-vine. He hesitated, but as the words “one of the rebels! down with him!” rent the air hoarsely from a dozen throats, he knew his guardsman’s helmet had betrayed him, and he dashed off. A shower of arrows rattled through the foliage around him. One broke the lacing of his iron cap, and two more not only cut off the plume upon it, but tore it altogether from his head. A fourth wounded the mule, and left a bleeding streak along its haunch. With a neigh of pain, the animal gritted its teeth on the bit and sprang away.

The prince’s hair was unloosed and it streamed back like a horse’s tail. Absalom’s hair was famous for its length, great beauty, and quantity. Hardly a woman’s could in any respect equal it. By this very vanity he was punished; so true is it that most wrong things are their own executioners.

The frightened and wounded animal, still more alarmed at the steps behind, flew along like an arrow, but in rushing under a large oak, whose boughs were low-lying, its rider's hair and his head was entangled in the branches, and his feet being shaken free, the mule dashed on in its way of terror. In pain as he was, yet the self-ensnared captive did not dare to raise a call for help, for he heard the followers of David, who were chasing him, halt close by. They listened till the sound of the mule's steps died away, and, regretting their being on foot, and reasoning that the supposed officer of high rank was safe now from them, they turned away.

With all his endeavors, Absalom only tired himself out in his endeavors to free himself. All he could do, throughout the weary hours, while the ever-changing din of battle never ceased around him, was to ease the strain by holding himself up by his hands till his fingers were benumbed by the blood being pressed out of them, and his arms ached with their awkward position. To make matters worse his jewelled dagger had been shaken out of its sheath, and he could not cut himself loose.

At last as he was hoarsely calling for the help that did not come, a straggling man of Joab's division, peeped through the thicket and espied him, but he did not dare to touch him.

Meanwhile, the woods saw the death of full twenty thousand by steel, stone and clubs, and the rebels were driven from the field at every point.

The commanders were inquiring as to the fallen and captured of the enemy, when the man who had seen the hanged prince told Joab of it.

"What! you a soldier of mine, and a good one, too. Taol!" cried the leader, "and you know so little of your duty as not to have struck him to the ground! Had you

made sure of his death—for his beaten friends may have relieved him now—I would have given you a sword belt of price and ten pieces of silver.”

“But, general, I heard, as well as the rest of our company, his majesty the king charge you and the other commanders to spare Prince Absalom. Why, after that, as the Lord liveth, general, I would not harm him for a thousand coins of gold. Am I to kill kings’ sons? Nothing can be hidden from King David, and he—and you yourself—would have punished me.”

“A fig for your reason, soldier mine. Be a better guide than you are smiter, and hasten to lead me to the place in the woods where the rebel’s long locks have twisted themselves into a rope, to hang him. Follow, some of you.”

They hurried through the forest, thickly strewn with dead and dying, and found Absalom still there, faint with pain. He could hardly look out of his agonized eyes. He had hardly opened his lips, white with anguish, than Joab snatched two or three light javelins from the nearest soldier, and flung them at the suspended prince. They entered every one of them the poor man’s body, but he still lived. Whereupon, half-a-dozen of Joab’s attendants fell upon him with their swords, cut him down from the tree, and despatched him. There was a large hollow in the woods, into which they flung the dead body, and covered it all over by rolling in logs and huge rocks on it. They blew the recall then, and the pursuers began to flock in from hunting down the fugitives.

King David was sitting with the old men between the gate posts. Around them were a small body of guards who kept the women and children at a distance. Watchmen, who had been chosen for goodness of sight, were walking on top of the city walls, and reporting as well as they could, the events of the distant action. All day they

had seen men go into the forest, where the slaughter went on, but none came out.

Suddenly a shout arose. A man was descried coming over the open ground that way.

"As he is alone, you say," remarked King David, "he must be a messenger."

But, behind the first, was a second runner.

"Another news-bearer," said the king.

The first man reached the gate. It was Ahimaaz. He cried out as he neared the group: "All is well!" for he saw the look of inquiry and of anxiety on every face as they beheld him, streaked with blood, powdered with dust, his clothes and buckler torn and hacked with sharp bough, briars and weapons. They made way for him up to the king, before whom he fell down and knelt.

"Praise and thanks," said he in a voice hoarse with shouting in battle, "to the ever-just Judge, to the God who giveth victory to his people."

"But is the young man Absalom safe?" said King David.

Ahimaaz kept his eyes downcast as he replied: "As I left the field there was a great tumult as of the capture of some chief, but I was in too much haste to stop."

"Rest yourself," said the king. "Here, stand by me."

As Ahimaaz rose, the second courier arrived. It was Cush, who had been sent by Joab, and whom the other had preceded expressly to spare his master the painful news.

"News, my lord the king," cried out the new-comer, "The Lord hath punished the rebellious, and they are scattered like chaff who rose against your majesty."

"But is the young man Absalom safe?" asked the king, tremulous with anxiety and half rising to catch the answer sooner.

"My lord," replied the messenger, "may all evildoers and

breakers of the peace of the realm be as that young man is !”

The king fell back in his seat, but, rising tremblingly and hiding his face with his hands, through which trickled tears, he went up into his house. The people, full of more interest in his grief than in the battle, gathered around, and they heard him, poor old bereaved monarch, wail :

“Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son, I would to heaven I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son !”

And in this violent way he sobbed, although the glad-some blare of trumpets and the cheers of victory from the returning hosts, came before long to the ear. And the vanquishers lowered their waving swords and the trophies, and turned their rejoicing into mourning. Instead of marching gaily, they stole into the city noiselessly, and with hanging heads like guilty ones. All this while the king, with covered face, was continuing his weeping. No one dared to approach him and try to enterrupt him or allay his griefs. But Joab, at length, boldly strode into the royal chamber, his mail clattering as he walked. The king looked up at the sound, for his emotion had been previously respected.

“My royal master,” said the general, “you are making us ashamed who have saved the lives of you and yours by showing that you love your enemies and hate your dearest friends. Any one can see that you would be better pleased to see your rebellious son Absalom alive to-day than to see us otherwise than dead under our shields and splintered weapons from his followers’ wounds. I say, my master, that you should come out and see the people who have spilt their blood and braved their lives for you. If you do not, all the evil that may have befallen you from your boyhood up to this seventieth year of yours, will be nothing to what will happen to you now.”

The returned combatants had gone to their tents, and, in disappointment and gloom, they were brooding over the victory which was darker than a defeat, when the news spread that the king, with washed face and head erect, was calling his old comrades and faithful subjects to him. They clustered about him with brightening faces and all was unclouded joy, when he thanked them for the deeds of valor they had accomplished under the forest trees and out on the plain that day.

After this great rout of the rebels, they were only too glad to throw down their arms, yield, and, with their allies, beg King David to resume his throne in Jerusalem. There he reigned for some years longer, having only the enemies of neighboring countries to contest with. Before he died, he chose his son Solomon to continue his name and replace him on the throne, and David, three score years since the day he had been the bravest in the whole army and had slain Goliath, breathed his last on a royal couch, to which by heavenly assistance and his own faithfulness he had been elevated from the straws he had slept on as a shepherd's boy.



*SOLOMON.*

As King David was dying of old age, and all were in doubt as to who would be his successor, many considered that he would appoint his favorite, a young man named Adonijah, who was so much beloved by him as to be styled in familiar speech, David's darling. Adonijah's mother flattered him into this belief and already he began to enjoy the rank he promised himself. He had a right royal retinue to accompany him wherever he went, a number of chariots drawn by two and three horses, and fifty men were the least in number he would have as escort. He and his followers were the more assured, in the expectancy of the regal dignity by the old king not having reproved this premature display.

On a certain day, Adonijah had assembled many of the nobles and men of influence at a feast. For the food there had been cooked an abundance of sheep, calves, oxen and kids; nuts, grapes, figs, honey, olives, other fruit, wine, rare birds and all the delicacies of the day were on the long table. They were rejoicing loudly, all the guests and crying out, between every toothsome mouthful and rich draught.

"Long live King Adonijah!" They had regaled to their hearts' content and they were about to continue their riot, when several at the window lifted their hands to demand attention and hush the laughing and jests over the aged monarch whose death they were desiring. All of a sud-



CH. W. OKE A. T.

But the sobbing mother gasped : " No, no, no ! Oh, God ! oh, King, do not slay my darling !  
Give it to her first ! " — Page 158



den, a blast of a score of trumpets broke forth and rent the perfumed air of the banquetting chamber.

"Hark!" cried they all, some feeling alarm.

But no warlike sounds succeeded. Instead of that the music of pipes and stringed instruments tuned in joyfulness followed the harsher brazen strain. And cheer after cheer of great multitudes rose to the ears of the favorite's guests.

"Can it be?" said they all, smiling.

Adonijah was no less gladsome than they, and wished them joy, each in the position that he had promised them. Some were going out in high glee to confirm what they suspected, when a priest's son, well known to them, met them, and was led to the room. Adonijah hastened to take off his cloth of gold coat and was about to slip it over the head of the new comer, saying: "Receive your reward, oh bearer of good tidings, as I see you are from your smile-wreathed face!"

But the man put out his hand.

"My lord, our lord, King David, has said that his successor shall be——"

"I know, myself. Thanks——"

"Nay, my lord. His son Solomon is king!"

"No!" cried the favorite fiercely, and he gripped the man's arm. "Don't jest with me!"

"In solemn truth, my lord, King Solomon is on the throne."

Seeing the looks of doubt and disbelief, the priest's son hastened to say in hurried accents:

"My lord and sirs, Nathan the prophet and all the great soldiers of David had an audience of the king. They mounted Solomon on his father's own mule, and have anointed him and crowned him King over all Israel. The country is receiving the news with rejoicing, and you can

hear the city acclaim the new sovereign. I was detained at the palace till now—I hope you will pardon my delay—and I heard King David bless his heir myself.”

The guests, who were seized with fear, did not say a word to him or to one another or to the favourite, but crept away to their own homes. Adonijah himself was affected by the same alarm and he lost no time in fleeing into the temple, where he clung to the altar, begging King Solomon to swear his life would be spared, or else he would not leave the sanctuary. The new monarch sent him word that the past was as nothing to him. If Adonijah should prove himself a well-doing man, no one should harm him; otherwise justice should be dealt to him. On this promise Adonijah came and made obeisance to the king whose place he had coveted. But he conspired again afterwards, and was executed. Thereafter there was no disturbance to the lawful ruler.

But, great as was King Solomon, he continued to follow the counsels of his father, and he was gentle and kind of heart as any among his numerous subjects. His whole prayer was—not for glories, riches, successes in wars, extension of domains, but for such wisdom as would let him guide his people properly. Because he was thus moderate in his ambition, heaven listened to his supplications, and made him wiser than any man before his time; and besides, gave him what he had not desired in such abundance that no monarch has ever equalled his magnificence.

To show his sageness, we may tell again the story of his judgment.

He was holding a religious feast in Jerusalem, when the soldiers of the door of the banquetting house barred the way to a noisy crowd, who seemed, headed by two clamoring women, to be eager to force an entrance. High above the wrangling voices, rose the cry: “Let us in,



guards! let them in! Let us hear the wise King Solomon adjudge. Let them in!" The king ordered the entry to be given, and, as soon as the crossed swords had been lowered from the doorway, the two women, abashed, were pushed into the royal presence.

The table had been removed to one side.

One of the women held, closely clasped to her breast, a child on which her whole gaze was fastened, so that she had no eyes for the spectators, the courtiers, the soldiers, or for the sovereign himself seated on his raised dais of scarlet. The other, an instant dazzled by the display, to which she was far from accustomed, preserved her bold air, and, despite the royal presence, glared fiercely at the other and the babe.

"Speak, you," said Solomon.

"O my lord, I am glad one of your wisdom is to judge of my truth. I and this false creature live in the same house, and we both had little babes, of which this is mine. We were all alone there. Her child died, some way or another, but she—cunning Philistine—crept into my room of a night and took away my dear boy, leaving the corpse in its stead. I awoke with the dead in my arms, but the morning light told me quickly of the trick. I asked for mine back again, but she won't give it. She resisted me, too, till the neighbors came in and helped her. I've made her come here, though. I know my lord is wise and righteous," added she, striving to prejudice the awarder.

"My lord," said the other bowing, and speaking tearfully, "I am guiltless of such cruelty. My child is here, where it should be. As the Lord—who planted you on the throne you adorn—doth live, this is my boy."

All was hushed. Among the bystanders, a thousand doubts ran; as many were for one as for the other contestant. They turned their eyes on the king. His brow was



clouded and almost frowning for a moment, but then it cleared.

"Zabud," said he to his principal officer, who stood by the side of the steps of the throne, "lend me your sword. Gallant blade as it is, innocent blood will not harm it," added he in a low voice. Then aloud: "Woman, give the child to the lieutenant of my guards beside you."

Awkwardly the man of war took the infant in his hands out of the reluctant ones of the woman, who could scarcely repress her sobs. The king held out the borrowed sword to his officer and said:

"Take it, sir. Now, strike as you have struck my father's enemies—sever the child in twain. Let each claimant be content with her just half."

The babe was held out in one hand, the steel flashed broadly rising over it, when a scream from an almost breaking heart rang out and shook the silken hangings. The woman who was accused was wrestling with the guards, in agony. The other's eyes were glistening, and hardly smothering a laugh of savage pleasure, she said eagerly: "Yes, yes, my lord, divide it, rather than give it me or her."

But the sobbing one, held back from shielding the menaced infant, gasped: "No, no, no! Oh, God! Oh, king, do not slay my darling! Give it to her first!"

She swooned in the soldier's arms, for she feared the loved child was already dead.

Solomon rose.

"You see," said he to all. "Give the boy to the mother—who she is, is only too plain."

And the poor tortured woman, recovering from her faint, hugged the recovered treasure to her bosom, thanked the king a thousand times, and, amid kisses and tears of joy over her babe, went away with light step and smiling face.

The other, from whom all recoiled, hid her face and fled from the audience hall, amid execrations that followed her steps even in the streets.

The King did not neglect his time, but, using his great opportunities, studied the natures of all living things, man, the animals, plants. Travelers came from remote regions to hear him speak and gather his words. He had a large army and a fine navy, which he employed principally to bring him objects unattainable at home from farther lands.

Among those whose curiosity was excited by the revelations of King Solomon's knowledge and magnificence, was the Queen of Sheba who was not satisfied with any but personal acquaintance with him.

She journeyed, therefore, to Jerusalem, with a large caravan of camels and dromedaries, laden with precious spices and stones, and with a great quantity of gold in lumps and dust and in manufactured articles. These she presented to her brother monarch after her arrival. She had imagined that the accounts which had gone to her of Solomon's splendor had gathered as they went, but she was undeceived at the sight of his palace, with its grand entrance-porch of the most sweet-scented cedar, and carved as cunningly as could be desired, and with its lofty audience-hall where she was received.

Over colored marble she walked to reach the throne, the way to which was hedged with courtiers, guards and censor-bearers, from whose golden fire-bowls streamed upward the inter-mixing aromas of frankincense, myrrh, calamus, saffron, and other perfumes. The royal seat was of ivory, the pieces of great purity and dimension, secured in place by gilt-headed nails and bands of the same valuable ore. Six lions of cast gold guarded each side of the steps to the chair, and two more, larger and even more life-like, stood at the side of the chair itself.

No silver was used because it had become common from its exceeding plenty throughout the realm, as had oedar wood, which by treaty, the King of Tyre sent to Jerusalem in abundance.

And Solomon himself struck the ravished view of the queen as well beseeming the truly regal show. In his ivory seat, lined with crimson worked in gold thread by the needlewomen, and studded with sapphires and onyx, he sat. His crown was all the brighter from encircling the head of luxuriant black hair, his beard was curled and glistening with perfumed oils. His eyes shone on her pleasantly, but they could flash royally at need. Gold rings were on his soft, well-formed hands, and his robe, a present from the king of Tyre, was of the unrivalled purple, which was the secret dye of that nation alone.

The haughty head of the queen bent before so much, and it was only on his sweet-toned voice addressing her, that she regained strength to reach the throne.

She made her visit longer than she expected, for every day he had something new to show her.

One day, it was his country retreat in the Forest of Lebanon, inlaid with precious stones and built of choice cedar. Then rides in his chariot of cedar, too, the wheels of silver, the sides of the body of gold and the lining of embroidered purple, while the horses, of the best Egyptian breed, were covered with silk-edged lion and leopard skins, a body of pompously accoutred horseman and footmen surrounding the royal host and guests. Visits to where vast vineyards extended under a merry sun and tossed the ruddy clusters of their fruit, to orchards quite as ample where apples, pomegranates and citrons, ripened and mellowed, all the while making the sweet air still more balmy by their emanations, to the fishponds in whose transparent depths were to be seen strange and handsome members of the finny

tribe so tame as to come to be fed from the hand of those they knew, to the reservoirs of water to supply the woods and gardens, whose broad sheets upheld boats of great size. To the gardens: through them they strolled, inhaling the fragrance from countless beds of lilies white and purple, of roses, of a thousand other buds and blossoms and of rare plants brought from retired retreats in wild woods leagues away. To the aviaries where birds of all kinds flaunted their variegated plumage and graceful shapes, where doves, as white as if they had been washed in milk or ringed about the neck as if they wore jewelled chains, fluttered and cooed melodiously on the almond trees, beneath which strutted the peacock with unfolded feathers. To see the royal flocks sheared by a hundred at one time, to see the goats branded, to see the foxes who had come to eat the grapes, hunted and killed. Or the queen rested, under a tent of silk with gold-thread tassels, while defiled before her the scarcely numberable ranks of Solomon's guard and army: Silken banners, gilt scabbards, fine steel, polished lances, proud chargers, and dromedaries of war, forming a novel sight for her dazzled gaze.

She said one day: "Oh, king without a rival, where can such glory be paralleled? Nowhere, of course."

"But yes," said he. "There is One greater than I can ever dream to be, for I am but man. There is One wiser more powerful, more adored. His house, too, in my kingdom owed to Him, outshines by night the finest of mine. Will you see?"

He escorted the Queen of Sheba from his own to the holy house, and showed her what she might see of the Temple.

The instruments for the fires and sacrifices were of polished brass; the basins and candlesticks were of gold. The massive stand for the priests to wash their hands in

was a great sheet of brass supported on the backs of twelve brazen oxen.

Two images of cherubims, whose gold-plated wings reached from one side of the house to the other, stood up and faced the altar. The veil that shrouded the Mystery was of interwoven blue, purple, and crimson threads of finest linen and its rods were gilt. The altar was brass and most marvellously cast and engraved; over it were outstretched the wings of the cherubims. The lamps were gold, and so were the chains they swung by.

Around all these rose the lofty walls decorated with carvings of angels and the blessings of heaven as shown in plants that give food to man. And above all was a ceiling of choice wood, plated with gold. The doorways were made of olive wood, enriched with sculpture. The pavement was wood in some parts, in other stone.

When the Queen of Sheba saw the ceremony proceed within the Temple, the sacred race of the priesthood officiating, the clouds of incense arising, she felt her heart much more impressed by this solemn glory than by Solomon's more glittering pomp, and—though she had already said: "Happy are your servants who can hear of your wisdom daily, and look on your sumptuousness," she said. "Still happier must you be, oh, wise King Solomon, to feel the Lord your King has delight in you so far as to thus show His love for you."

But Solomon had yet to show one thing: that he was mortal. He sinned, and bitterly he was made to repent his luxury, for the pains that pleasure not pure always entails, were showered thickly and heavily upon him. But, nevertheless, it was in peace that he died and that his sons succeeded him to the crown.



*HEZEKIAH.*

THIS is a picture of the times during which passed the boyhood years of Hezekiah the son of King Ahaz the wicked ruler to whom lay many of the causes of the darkness over the sinful nation.

The border of Israel no longer extended to the Red Sea, of which their last port had been taken. Enemies in large and small bands roved over the land as they pleased, only not daring to go near the defended towns. The faint-hearted farmers, finding they sowed for others to reap, left their fields. These being robbed of their tiller's care, went to ruin. There was neither spring, nor summer nor winter-fog, which were plucked off unripe, and the wood itself burnt, with the ploughs, harrows, wains, drags, ox-carts and timbers of abandoned cottages, at the camp-fires of invaders. Briars covered the orchards, thistles choked up surviving grain, thorn bushes climbed into the almond and citron trees, the vineyard lattices were overrun with wild creepers and the grapes that were still borne were bitter as gall-nutts. The grass failed and, when it did grow feebly, it had the sickly yellow hue of spoilt hay. The great trees were felled and taken off on the spared cart-wheels, by the stolen cattle. The hostile parties, on fleet steeds, encircled the towns and prevented communication; so that nothing living disturbed the smooth dust of the highways except, perhaps, packs of wild dogs feeding on murdered wayfarers and flung stripped into the roadside ditches. The valleys had no sounds to send up to the mountain tops, for the

little birds had fled, and the vultures followed the slayers. In Jerusalem the capital city, the most valiant leaders and footmen were gloomy, while the rest grieved over the deprivations; the enemy having oftentimes come up to the very gates and exchanged bowshoots with the keepers of the wall, while others of them ravaged the market-gardens and destroyed, what they could not take away, of milk vegetables, honey, wine.

Amid all this visitation, the wicked Israelites—not seeming to be true descendants of the patriarchs—still remained determined not to recognize the hand of heaven. In the streets, in the houses and inmost rooms, the rich people had their idols of plated gold bedecked with precious stones and chains of silver; the poorer had theirs of common blacksmiths' make in iron or sheeted with tin and lead; the poorest of all knelt on their house-tops to worship the queen of heaven or other gods in the sun, moon, or stars. Altars of brick, stone and metal smoked daily with offerings to foreign gods, who were totally unable to bring on a calamity and yet were implored to remove the effects of the people's own misdeeds. In the valley of Tophet, there were wretches who did not hesitate to give children to the image of Moloch, drowning their screams of pain by drumming and shouting.

This was under the eyes of the Holy City and its Temple of the Lord. But it had become the refuge to cowards and robbers from all over the country, who rioted there with their bloody gains. The sons and daughters of the unjust judges who enriched themselves during the misery of the land, paraded the street with great sumptuousness. They tinkled their golden leglets, armlets and necklaces to receive the shouts of servile throngs, smiled scornfully when widows of men slain in the open country by their pillagers, begged of them, and tossed their diademed heads at the

sight of the soldiers, dusty and smelling of the camp, who came to the chief city from other towns to keep the roads a little open by the escorting of royal messengers and news from members of separated families.

The study of such scenes was forced upon the boy-prince's mind, and he profited by it. Scarcely had his father died and he ascended the throne in his turn than he proceeded to undo all that King Ahaz had done in the way of evil.

In the first month of his succession, he had the great gates opened of the Temple and gold plates put on instead of the ones removed to be given to the Assyrian as ransom. He had the images, high and low, of rich and poor, pulled down and ground to pieces, the trees which had been worshipped were cut up for firewood, he broke in bits the brazen serpent of Moses because it was worshipped as no figure, though handled once by a great prophet, deserved in the least to be as a mere savior (which it was not, except by grace) in itself; he replaced as far as it was possible the injury done to sacred vessels of the house of prayer, collected the members of the priesthood from all over his realm and reinstated them.

The temple being made fit once more for the true religion, King Hezekiah sent letters to all the tribes of Israel near him for them to appear at Jerusalem, and many did come to join with all of the great city in a celebration of the pass-over. Thousands of cattle were offered up on this occasion of a whole nation begging mercy, and the like had never been seen since Solomon had dedicated the holy house.

Thus having his subject, daring once again, only afraid of the Lord whom they had offended, and whose just anger they had essayed to propitiate, King Hezekiah showed himself as bold in the right as his sires had been timorous while wrong. He despatched an embassy to Nineveh, to tell the

King of Assyria that he must not expect that the new monarch of Judah, was, though a youth, made of yielding stuff, but would find that the boy-king was resolved to pay the yearly tribute no longer. To give the army he was raising exercise in the field, they were marched against the Philistines whose lands they entered up to the city of Gaza, which they assaulted and very nearly mastered.

For more than ten years all went wonderfully well with the Israelites, so long as they renewed the ancient but ever young faith, but happiness and quiet dulled their exertions. Their brethren being overcome in Samaria by the Assyrians did not prove severe enough lesson to them. Hezekiah had continued to set an example, than which there could be none better; all the good that could be done, he did with all his heart.

Not to punish him, therefore, but as a judgement on the people, beginning to relax and retreat from the solemn vow to the Lord which they had taken thirteen years before, Sennacherib King of Assyria, was let invade Judah, and made himself master of many of the principal towns with a suddenness and with a force which prevented Hezekiah defending them or even hoping to relieve them by dint of arms. But it was painful to his kind heart to hear the complaints of the surrendered Hebrews, who feared that they would be expatriated like their brothers of Samaria, and he announced to Sennacherib that he would pay him tribute. This ransom was fixed as high as thirty talents of gold and three hundred of silver.

To pay such a sum, King Hezekiah not only had to give up all the contents of his royal treasury, but reverently borrow from the house of the Lord. No one was displeased, for all believed that the warrior-robber, being thus bought off, would leave the kingdom with only those enemies to contend against that it could resist and defeat with ease.

But Shebna the royal treasurer, who was a foreigner and a traitor, who had cunningly taken of the money placed in his charge, and who feared that his thefts might be discovered at any moment, wrote secretly to the Assyrian sovereign and, for pay which enabled him to cover his faults and continue his extravagances, he transmitted intelligence of the state of the kingdom. Sennacherib, willing to break his faith with a power he considered greatly beneath him, lent an open ear to the reports of the weakness of Hezekiah in his people's love, riches and warlike feeling.

To the surprise of all the Hebrews, who relied upon the Assyrian keeping his pledge, the latter, at the head of an immense force made a second invasion of Judah, and the first news of his breaking of troth was accompanied with the further tidings that he had captured two or three strongholds already.

King Hezekiah, recovering from the unexpected shock, determined to attempt not again to secure an unsteady peace by money, but essay arms against arms. Word went out from the capitol all over to the places on every side, to call in the out-lying forces. They were falling back, as it was, before the strong scouting parties of light armed Persians who covered Sennacherib their commander's advance, taking care to strip the deserted country of all the flying villagers had been unable to carry off. So innumerosly did the armed men begin to flock in, that the great city in both of its parts, upper and lower, buzzed and grew animated as a hive. The towers along the walls were filled with the guards assigned to posts, who rapidly filed into their positions. In places, too, on the broad top of the thick enclosure, numbers of soldiers were engaged in mounting huge engines, catapults, balistas, and unnamed machines for hurling great rocks and whole flights of darts at one time. Over the temple on the higher towers of



Ophel, the watchmen relieved one another at short intervals to insure the utmost freshness of search.

The city had been full of tumult and sound before on different occasions, but the excitement and noise of the present was never surpassed. The people, having no business to be carried on except that connected with the military, for the blacksmiths' plied their pincers, hammers, bellows and grindstones most actively in preparing weapons and mail—except a few very much alarmed females, who preferred to peer through the lattice of the windows into the streets when they did command such a view, to see the troops go by, blackened the roof-tops, and bent their earnest gaze on the plain, on the outworks and on the squares where the warriors were being detailed for duty.

To annoy the foe as much as possible in case he should attempt a siege, a couple of large detachments went up behind the city and diverted the stream from the spring of Gihon which filled the upper reservoir, and turned Shiloh's rill and Siloam's shaded pool towards the walls so as to run into the great ditch between the two defensive lines and turn its deep trench into a miniature river. They did all the damage they could to all other sources of supply around the place as well on the hills as on the plain. To mend the great wall in places where it had been suffered to be breached, to permit entrances by which time was saved, houses near by were purchased out of the city money and their material used for the repairs.

Night came to the city thus.

A night of all but repose, silence and darkness. The furnace lights gleamed out of the armorers', where a clicking of sledges on metal breast-plates and weapons resounded, the sentries on the lines of masonry exchanged the watchwords, steel flashed everywhere in the streets, on the heads and bodies of men and in their hands, and the open spaces

were crowded with vast concourses of people listening to the preaching of Isaiah the prophet and the inciting of King Hezekiah, who went the grand round of the outposts in person. The activity of all was heightened by seeing in the distance, about midnight, stars spring to life on the hills from afar off to the other end of the plain, forming a chain of glittering points. It was the route which signal-fires traveled to warn all, that the Assyrians were marching that way.

During the morning hours men on swift camels and horses began to dash over the level ground and hurry to the king after admission at the gates, well barred and barricaded. They were couriers with the intelligence of new victories by the foreign hosts, how they were in countless masses like locust swarms, how their spearheads in a body were like a sheet of remote lightning reflected on the sky, how their horses' hoofs cut up the roads and had to spread far each side of them in preserving their great front, how the wheels of their chariots, full of archers, made an uproar like a whirlwind at its height. They had their divisions in every direction and hardly anybody could escape their scouts. The Hebrews who had attempted to flee to Egypt had been cut off and all the treasure that they had loaded themselves down with, had been taken by their captors.

These messengers, too, bore terrifying accounts of the components of the foe, the different nations whose quotas formed its myriads, and of the strange gods by which swore these treaders-down of cities, gods whose images they carried ever with them upreared on poles instead of banners, and whom they confidently spoke of placing in the Israelites' Lord's Temple in the city, the joy of the whole earth. They bore uncouth weapons: sickles on spear-poles by which they cut men in two, lances of great length and shields of the strangest shapes, metal bows with which,

so heavy were they, a man could be felled to the earth as with a sword.

The morning passed without a sign of the enemy, but fugitives continued to hasten in from the lonely country, their camel's hair tents on the backs of mules, with their children and treasures. Their haste and numbers increased every hour, until as the middle of the afternoon was reached, the fugitives then arriving assured the captain of the gate-guard that he had better send out spies or a small force to repel the skirmishers of the Assyrians whom they had seen in motion, but how strong they had not waited to ascertain.

All over Jerusalem the sound of intense animation arose. The king, his chief men and priests exhorted the soldiers, tightening their belts and girding on their armor, to remember they were defending the homes of their kings, of the glorious ark and Temple, and the honor of the One whose shrine was there set. The women, though some wept, crowded the roofs in spite of the heat of the sun, and their faces unveiled without their being censured now, waved Godspeed to their fathers, husbands and brothers. The men at the gates shouted and clashed cymbals to their comrades who sallied out and crossed the plain.

All eyes were strained to mark, through the fine, sun-baked sand, they themselves stirred up, and through the heated air that made them seem doubled as well as indistinct in wavy outline. At the very margin of the plain, at the beginning of the road coming down the hill-side, appeared a body of horsemen, and of racing chariots drawn by fleet horses three abreast. The two parties, Israelites and Assyrians (for such were the latter, a strong spy-party,) halted instinctively at so unexpected a meeting.

But the Hebrew, no sooner seeing what a long train filled up the defile than divining that none of their scattered fu-

gitives could be those scarlet clothed riders with scarlet shields and strange weapons, doubled their front ranks and dashed on, under a cloud of their javelins which they hurriedly darted. Entangled in the downward road of which the Hebrews walled up the end with their combattants, the Persians fell back and stopped their friends from advancing. The assailants, securing the horses of the advance who had been slain, wheeled round in obedience to their prudent leader's word and galloped at the top of their speed straight back to the city. The enemy were so inextricably confused that they did not begin to chase them until they were well out of shot. The Hebrews reached the gates, of which one wing was open for them, and passed in with their trophies.

The Persians, in fury at having been so shamefully surprised, as soon as disengaged from the valley road, pricked up their fast horses and scattered over the plain in a head-long race. Some of their foremost flung a score of darts at the half-opening, and, though most of them bent their points or shivered to splinters against the just-closing gate, yet two of the missiles struck to death each its man.

Now it happened that, such was the expanse of wall to be guarded, every available men had been pressed in to the service, and, in some cases prisoners, immured for lesser crimes as of debt, were let join the troops. Among the party who had gone out and thus returned with the foe at their heels, were two brothers, who, though only lately confined for petty faults, were really very bad men, murderers and robbers, who had fled to Jerusalem from Lachish, confident that the state of the kingdom would prevent news of their doings being important enough to spread. These two were those who had been transfixed by the Persian javelins. One died outright, the other writhed with a mor

tal wound, but, after a farewell glance at his dead brother, he looked up to the sky over the glittering top of the Temple, where fluttered the doves, sparrows and swallows, frightened from the noisy city to this tranquil spot, and exhaled his last breath in these words :

“ Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments—more than upright, even too good, for I little deserve so honorable a death as in fighting for thy Holy City.”

The enemy, foiled by the gates being shut in their faces, galloped along the wall and shot at the keepers. But these were fully prepared, and a shower of stones, darts and arrows whistled around them, pinned one or two to the leopard-skin saddles, reddened with blood their scarlet coats, and compelled them to retire under their shields beyond range. There they drew up on the plain, while the richly dressed among them, officers, began to examine the city's defenses from Ophel to the lower town. This done without interruption, for they were so lightly armed and on such swift chargers that there was no body of men inside Jerusalem able to have overtaken and punished them, they at length, at nightfall, drew off.

Now that it seemed certain that an attack was going to be made by Sennacherib, soon after this report of the condition of the city should be transmitted to him, the soldiers were more than ever on the alert, and the citizens of all ages and conditions were called upon to give some hours of their time to the completing of the repairs of the walls and the mounting of engines. But, in spite of the pious prompting of King Hezekiah, who set the example by taking no rest himself, and of others, many of the richer people, following the example of Shebna the traitorous treasurer, laughed at the young king and the priests and continued the feast, saying :



"More meat, more wine! to-morrow the dreadful Assyrians will level the city with the dust. To-morrow we die, let us eat and be merry while we can!"

They would not go out to work at the defenses or let their servants go. The common people, who were not so rebellious, murmured at this partiality and demanded of the king that he should evince his power. Hezekiah was too just not to consent, especially on learning besides that Shebna and his friends were arming their retainers and threatening to resist any of the king's troops who might be sent to arrest them for their sedition. But they quickly were cowed at the first showing of the king's rising to the level of the occasion and having them seized by such a large body of the guards that it would have been folly for them to resist. Shebna, changing face with the rapidity of the treacherous, so conducted himself that he was left at liberty. He determined to be revenged, however, for having so many of his followers disgraced.

Nothing happened that night except that the signal-fires blazed in a long train once again to betoken that some portion or all of the Assyrian's myriads were in motion thitherward. The dark hours passed amid the shouting of psalms and the exhortations of wakeful King Hezekiah and the priests. The clatter of pikes shifted from shoulder to shoulder, the rattle of arrows in quivers against the ivory backplates and targets, the clank in the forges, and the measured pace of the look-outs were intermingled with deep sentences floating on the air in fragments.

"The Lord hath delivered them to the slaughter.—Give thanks to Him who smote great kings, and who redeemed us from our enemies, for His mercy endureth forever.—Blessed be the Lord our Fortress, our high Tower and Deliverer.—Deliver us from the hand of strangers.—The Lord preserveth all them that love Him.—I will avenge me of

mine enemies, saith the Lord of Hosts.—The enemy shall not exact from him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him, and I will beat down his enemies before his face.”

After the previous visit nobody was astonished when, after a noise like a distant rushing wind, had swept over the plain, there appeared in sight a much larger force than that of the other day. Besides the scarlet riders seen then with their bundle of spears at their saddle-bows and bows and arrows at their backs, there were the gold-laced purple coats of Sennacherib's own guard, followed by other troops variously accoutred. The dust was made to rise to obscure their coming and prevent their main body and rear being accurately counted.

They came on slowly, and their spears blazed over their glittering helmets and coats and gently-rolling chariot wheels, in a sheet of points for some time under the gaze of the keepers of the city walls. But, several horsemen who spurred in advance of the array waved their mantles and shook green boughs instead of weapons in sign of peace. They were let approach the gates therefore, these few who took the lead, and challenged through the little wicket opened for the parley. They said that Rabshakeh, a general of Sennacherib's army was at the head of this great band, which was only an escort befitting the great king's great captain, and that he demanded speech of King Hezekiah.

But the king would not confer with him in person and sent three messengers in his stead. One of these three was the false Shebna, who had intruded himself. They were let out and advanced some fifty feet from the gate, unarmed. Every archer on the towers of the gates held his arrows ready to cover them and punish treachery. The Assyrians did the same as Rabshakeh came forward to meet them, alone, for he was too much of a soldier to

fear to encounter the three, who were not only of some age but peaceful-looking. The customary greetings were exchanged equally haughtily on either side.

"Bear these words to King Hezekiah," said Rabshakeh; "Sennacherib the war-axe of Nineveh, 'daughter of troops', who has overrun this land, and taken all the frontier towns and now is on the eve of possessing himself of Lachish, would know on what terms King Hezekiah will treat with him and ransom the captured towns and their people?"

Eliakim, the son of the high steward of the royal household, one of the three, answered: "But your master already has broken one bond of faith, will he be satisfied with another taste of spoil? No, we are only prepared to give him war."

"War? war?" repeated the Assyrian scornfully, "what can you trust to that you speak so loftily. To Egypt? A fig! 'tis but a bending reed, which, breaking under your weight, will wound you with its splinters—such is that Pharaoh. Do you trust to your armament? Tush! you are but hares to the warriors of Sennacherib, and in numbers even we can eat you up, like caterpillars a leaf, or the black men's ants a cedar's trunk. I am but one of my lord's captains, but I can show you two thousand horses caparisoned for war, of my own self—think of my captain's power, then! Will you trust to your God? Folly, I tell you. Sennacherib of Nineveh has overcome people who had richer gods than he your Hezekiah sets up for you, and their images have been flung by Assyrian hands into their own altar fires."

"But they were mere images," said Eliakim; "our God is not the work of men's hands, but is the Maker of things overpoweringly impossible to mankind, the world, the stars above it."

"Enough," said Rabshakeh, "you speak like your boyish king."

"I speak like all within Jerusalem," replied Eliakim, "from king to beggar at the gate, who limps about to collect stones for the slingers with his crippled hands, and changes his whine for alms into the prayer: "God save our king, our country and ourselves, that all may know thou art alone a true God."

"So talk a few of you," said the Assyrian, raising his voice, for he noticed that the men on the wall were crowding nearer the gates to try to hear the conference, which was in Hebrew. "But all cannot be so foolish as to wish to be besieged, should the place not be taken by storm, and perish of famine and thirst on account of your petty obstinacy."

"Sir," said Eliakim, "I pray you speak less loudly, or, if you must so do, let your words be in Chaldee, for we understand that tongue."

"Yes," said the third envoy, "they hear us on the wall."

"Nay, nay," interrupted Shebna, exchanging a sign with the Assyrian to proceed, "we are not afraid if all within the city hear."

"My master did not send me only to speak with you, sirs," said Rabshakeh at the highest pitch of his voice, "but the same to the men, nobles, or the gallant common soldier to whom already his crust is begrudged."

And encouraged by Shebna's secret signs, the Assyrian pursued in a loud tone, and directing his speech to the masses thronging the outworks:

"Hear ye, hear ye, what Sennacherib the conqueror, says to you. Let not King Hezekiah deceive you, he cannot deliver you, any more than the God he has set up has power to do. No. The King of Assyria is merciful as

mighty, and he says he will pardon all rebels who lay down their arms, and pay him a light tribute merely in form, besides promising them their lands uninterrupted, until he shall send for you to come to a better than your own, one of plentiful corn, and wine and honey."

And giving orders, which had undoubtedly been expected, a number of horsemen galloped to right and left along the walls and, while some attracted with trumpets an audience to the point before which they drew rein and cried out their captain's words, others shot arrows high in air to fall harmlessly inside; they had rolled papyrus manuscript containing this amnesty proclamation of Sennacherib instead of their removed steel heads.

But King Hezekiah had most of these latter picked up and destroyed, while he made speeches to the guard of the defences, who did not answer a word to the Assyrians' attempt to buy them from their allegiance. And the answer to Rabshakeh was for him and his master to go on to do their worst, they would only find men defending their city, their king and the Temple. With this the Assyrian envoy departed and left the place to comparative peace.

Meanwhile Sennacherib, though he had heard a rumor that the King of Ethiopia, had proclaimed war against him, raised the seige of Lachish and, moving nearer Jerusalem, began to throw up works against Libnah, where Rabshakeh returned to him. Thence the king wrote letters to Hezekiah, in which he threatened him and derided the God of the Israelites whom he set in his estimation even below the idols of various places which he had reduced.

Isaiah the prophet encouraged the king and the people, and foretold that the King of Assyria, however likely such an act was, would never appear before Jerusalem in force to throw up a single line of intrenchments, or shoot an



arrow, or rear an engine, much less harm it or its guardians.

Shebna, continuing his traitorous plotting, was deposed from his office, and, some years afterwards, received his punishment in being made a captive to one who scorned the riches which his underhanded dealings had gained for him, and treated him like any poor Jew.

Such had been the activity shown by King Hezekiah ; he had reviewed his troops, studied plans of defence, settled mooted points, spent nights in prayer and at work, that he felt sick and lay almost at the point of death. His illness and dread of passing from life at that momentous time was heightened by the alarming picture which his fevered fancy drew of the distraction of his realm, for he had no heir and its division would be ruin. He had had great peace until now, when all was bitterness. In the midst of his weeping, for his misery and pain drew tears from his valiant heart that wished to be up and doing, the Prophet Isaiah cheered him with the saying that his prayers would be answered and asked him if he wished proof direct from heaven.

"To prove, oh, king, that, not only will the Lord—blessed be His name—rescue you from death, but your people from destruction, this will be done ; a feat akin to the favor of Joshua. The sun," said Isaiah, as he pointed through the open window of the garden, beside which Hezekiah was reclining, at the great sun dial with its tall needle in the centre of marble slabs which the former king Ahaz had made, "the sun—as you see—stands so. Behold—the shadow returns—see, see !"

Indeed, the great flaming disc retraced its road, sensibly moving, and on the dial's table the shadow of the mark moved, not three, not five, but ten degrees in an instant.

The sun, from being above the horizon a considerable distance, had rapidly rolled on to its rest, and sunk out of sight!

No sooner was Hezekiah healed than he had a statement of his cure placed in the public places for all, who had seen the miracle, to read and to see his thanks. It is to be believed that the people were more confident now against Sennacherib's prowess. Still the latter had not appeared before the city, and scouts could not find him or his advance.

While they were thus in Jerusalem afraid to credit what they had to believe that God needed none of their feeble assistance to show His might against Sennacherib the terror to men, while they were passing the night in wakefulness fearing that any moment the signal fires would stream up on the high lands, kindled by friends, another scene more awfully grand than the Holy City presented with all the running to and fro with weapons unsheathed, was transpiring in the Assyrian camp at Nob.

Sennacherib's host was composed of a mixture of the many nations he had subdued and of such bands of adventurers as had flocked to so warlike a monarch's standard, for the sake of the plunder which was to be expected in his ruthless invasions and for fear of the consequences of crimes and bloodshed which they had committed and from whose consequences he alone of men could protect them.

Each division was in its own village of camps: some in tents, some in rude houses that they had hastily made of boughs. Here the gigantic Sabeans, huge axe at hand, slept at the right of the royal guards, whose common soldiers gloried in the richest purple and gold; there the Syrians glittered in the slight motion of breathing with their silver scaled coats. The swarthy Egyptians with their bundles of reed javelins as long as a man but, scarcely heavier

than an ostrich's feather, slumbered in advance of the jet Ethiopians, in whose black and large ears gleamed massy ear-rings melted from pillaged gold, and beside whose arms were various weapons, spiked clubs, maces, hatchets and envenomed spears. The sacred cohort of the relations of the priests of Nisroch, god of Nineveh, were enrobed in white over brass chain mail and wore white plumes in their brazen helmets polished like gold. The Persians, clad in scarlet, in which colors their horses were bedecked, kept the outposts to the right, a place of honor confided to them for their late excellence shown in scouring the wretched Land of Judah. So all the swarms, like bees suffocated with smoke, had sank to rest.

By degrees, despite their efforts, the sentinels yielded to the invincible feeling creeping over them and fell asleep, this one leaning against the captain's tent, this against a machine for hurling rocks, that on his lance, that sitting on a stone, his head bowed on his hands and them clasped on his sword-hilt.

So all were asleep, all from the royal commander to the meanest camp-followers, from the captains to the soldiers, all slept. The horses, camels and cattle captured were subdued by the same invisible force.

The sleep was deep beyond expression.

The waking was to be awful.

The night was calm, not a cloud had obscured the setting sun, and all the stars were out and studding the sky which the moon brightly silvered. That aught should befall those two hundred thousand and more of irresistible warriors seemed, and perhaps was, impossible to man. To Him, to whom nothing is beyond His power, what was to come was a simple thing.

As suddenly as noiselessly, long horse's-tails of clouds, ominously white in the moon's rays, began to skim over

the azure dome, like so many scraps of veils gradually united. The moon and stars faded and faded till, after having barely penetrated with wan and ghastly beams the thickening shroud, they disappeared altogether behind the thickly accumulated vapor. Only one star was left unobscured ! it was Lucifer, away down on the horizon from whence the pall had been drawn ; it appeared as if it stood for the fallen angel whose name it bore, and was made in punishment to behold a new condemnation of pride only less severe than the fallen prince's own. It made the darkened scene all the more impressive to behold that one point irradiating over one little quarter of the immense ebony vault.

Amid the gloom, faintly to be discerned, a fleecy line of cloud seemingly descended to the earth, rolled on swiftly over the plain like thistle-down in a tempest's fore-running blasts. This flying miasma, heavy enough to keep only a few feet from the ground, which shrunk from its approach, and seemed to seek to swallow its sweet little plants from the evil, had no sooner reached the camps than it began to widen its wings and envelope all the thousands in its impalpable but forcible folds.

It seemed a signal.

At that moment, while a souging of chained winds above responded to a growling of another spirit of destruction entombed beneath the earth, a ball of fire, leaving a path of sparks, dropped straight from the densest mass of the inky cumuli above, and, after its descent of miles accomplished in an instant, struck the gilt crown over the tent-pole's tops of King Sennacherib. The crash that burst forth far overhead, rent the clouds to display a vast sheet of fire these stored up, and rolled from one confine of the celestial cupola to the other. This leading thunderbolt exploded when it touched the thing of earth and scattered

its fragments far and wide. A thousand thunderbolts darted downwards from all points, aslant, straight and serpentine. A myriad of meteors, red as blood, yellow as gold, white as a corpse, green as grass, rained from the bursting bosoms of overladen clouds. A wind careered from east and west, from north and south, blowing scorching hot and freezing cold at the same breath, towards the doomed encampment, tossed high in air the tents unfired by the shower of stars, and tore down everything ere shredding them to tiny pieces. The earth, shaking with terror at the flood of horrors dancing terribly upon its agonized surface and falling unfailingly, opened its mouth to emit its groans and screams of blue and pale yellow vapor, which kindled by the fiery æolites, blazed up and formed of the chasms bottomless pits of hellish flames.

That silent agent who had enwrapped the slumbering armies in its snowy garment had stifled unnumberable of the mighty. More of the valiant before awakened were dead with the lightning-strokes, most mercifully for them, for the cloth under their armor, kindled by the subtle fluid burnt on slowly and sent its dull blaze and low smoke through the plates and scales to tarnish its outer gloss. Merciful indeed was the Avenger to these in slaying them without delay, though their inanimate bodies thus consumed. Their fate was happy compared to that of the wretches who like Senacherib, had neither been smothered nor struck to the earth.

These awoke, their eyes dazzled with the multitudinous arrows of heaven darting down and around, their ears deadened with the roar above the explosions about and the crash beneath. They were nearly paralyzed with fear and they could hardly stand with their trembling limbs on the quivering ground. Confused in mind, benumbed in body, they staggered this way and that like a tarrier late at the



wine-cup, seeking shelter with groping arms and studied step. But they stumbled by scores over the heaps of their late companions in battle, who lay as still now as their weapons and, like them, illumined, not with the soul, but with the lingering lightning and sulphurous tongues that streamed from the flammivomous earth, that played on the dead flesh and over the steel.

The most active man was as helpless as his arrows, tarnished in barb, burnt in shaft and scorched in feather; the strongest was past lifting his blackened axe with splintered helve; the charioteer was entombed beneath a ruin of the melted fragments of wheels and car and the dismembered carcasses, bleeding with smoky blood, and roasting offensively, of the late splendid steeds; tents were tinder veils over whole suffocated decemvirates.

The few survivors sought to flee from under the canopy of never ceasing deaths, over a field of endless dead. It was uneven hideously, for its mountains were of corpses, its rivers of flames, its chasms graves, its pathways obstructed with the lifeless, whose heaped up companions were the hedges, from which, drained inflamed blood. The wretched fugitives, those who escaped falling into the suddenly-yawning jaws made by the earthquake, or being stifled with poisonous vapors, or being kindled into living candles by fiery gasses which surrounded some and were kindled by the glancing zigzags, or being mercifully slain by weighty masses of ignited stones dropping from skyward, these saved ones no sooner crossed the borders of the visited camp than, tired and horrified as they were, they fled with swiftest step from one another, from the scene of desolation.

They were spared to spread the tidings of how the Unequalled had deigned to war against his feeble creation, but they hurried on unbelieving in such relief. Did they

glance over their shoulders, heaving with their quick caught breath they beheld God's banner in the sky, above his legions of angels, soaring over or descending upon the encampment. A field of sable overhead checkered and striped with network of fire; a field of smoke beneath pierced with gulfs in combustion and embroidered with circling and crossing torches that were deadly in their lambent sports. So on they rushed, the wind following them with chance stars on its wings, a stray globule of glowing gas, an eye of incandescence, a ball of blue and green, a dart of dazzling brilliancy, a train of sparks. These were transformed by their alarmed sight into phantasms the most horrific. They thought they were hunted down by spectre riders, on fantastic ghosts of steeds, spirits swept along down on them, brandishing flaming swords, visionary flights of arrows winged their way from terrible bows that unseen archers bent.

Morning's light alone brought them calm, and they sunk into the rest their fatigue demanded to sleep unbroken but preys to dreadful dreams.

Meanwhile, the garrison within Jerusalem, tired at being cooped up with no foe in sight at whom to deal a blow, had loudly begged to be led out to search for the antagonist who had sworn to meet them. But, until now Isaiah the Prophet had counselled King Hezekiah not so to do. At last, he had said that they might tranquilly proceed, and solemnly added that their arms, brightly burnished, would return stainless of the foemen who had set themselves up against the heavens.

That same dawn they were near the encampment at Nob where the latest reports had truthfully placed the Assyrians.

There the Hebrews began to form for the attack and they marched on in the ancient order. It was a grand

sight, to see them, resolute and confident, about to engage a force many times more powerful, and responding with loud voice to the singing of the priests. These latter had blown their silver trumpets and then chanted :

“ A thousand shall fall at your left side and ten thousand at your right hand. But I will give peace to this land, and the sword shall not go through it. Ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall die before you. A hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.”

And the army entoned, slashing their weapons against their shields and breastplates :

“ If we walk in thy statutes, oh, glorious Lord ! If we keep thy commandments, oh, God of our fathers !”

If they felt all trust in heaven at that moment when they seemed soon to be at sword's point with the enemy, how deep was their thankfulness when their advance, uninterrupted to their surprise, brought them into view of the vast encampment abandoned by the two hundred thousand soldiers, who were never to fight again, never to spread terror and devastation.

An immense spoil awaited the Hebrews there, and the king was repaid a hundred-fold for the tribute which he had had to sacrifice to Sennacherib's rapacity. Once again was the Temple of the miracle-working God decorated as it deserved, as once again peace was on the land. The Assyrian king had been murdered by his own sons while giving thanks to Nisroch the Nineveh god for his escape from the battle-field, and he left no successor of his own stamp to alarm the children of Israel. The city, all agitation from the expected storm, became the most quiet of habitations.

King Hezekiah the Good thenceforth spent his life in unbroken prosperity. His happy people, under so just a monarch, increased their flocks and herds. The wilderness

was made to blossom like a garden of roses, and houses sprang up in the stead of the ones ruined by the armies. And when he died, few were the sons of David who had been so bewailed and so magnificently sepulchred.

*ELIJAH.*

It was in the wicked King Ahab's time, that a man of Gilead, named Elijah, was chosen to receive holy intelligence because he had sought goodness and justice with his whole heart and been ever guided by the commandments and by the fear of the Lord. All Samaria that were still righteous, shuddered at King Ahab's black acts of impiety, but they dared not say one word against the erection of altars and idols of Baal. Ahab had even married a daughter of a heathen monarch, to whose religion he subscribed.

It was one day on which the royal family were returning to the palace, that Elijah interrupted the procession and denounced the king for his crimes against God and man, and foretold the drouth which was to punish the realm. The furious Ahab would have had him cut to pieces as he spoke, but he lost himself in the crowd beyond the soldiers' search and hid himself. He was hunted after so closely that he ventured to stay no longer in the town but fled by night to a cave by the brook of Cherith, a feeder of the Jordan. He had its water to drink, and hence thirst had no terrors for him. But, as he dared not let himself be seen by any man, he had to content himself for some time on berries and even edible bark of trees. These failed him and to the last and only Supporter, he prayed. Ravens took from the town small



loaves of bread and pieces of meat, and carried them all the long way to unloosen them from their talons at the prophet's feet. So he lived, by providential means.

But the dryness he had foretold was now afflicting Samaria, and Cherith, from no rain, no dew supplying its source grew lower and lower each day, till the stones in its baked channel, were clean from moisture. Elijah crossed the country into Sidonia.

He was wearily approaching the gates of Zarephath, when he met a poor woman who was gathering firewood from the brush. Tired out, he sat down near her and asked her to bring him a little water to drink. She willingly consented, saying that she lived just within the gates, and would not be long gone, and had lifted up her bundle of wood to carry it, when the wayfarer added :

"And I pray you, kind woman, to bring me a bit of bread the least bit, in your hand."

"Oh, sir, you ask almost too much there," returned she, "truly, I have nothing baked in my whole house in the way of cake or bread. I am gathering these few sticks now to cook a little meal and a little oil for my son, who is ill and out of work, and myself. Heaven knows where our next meal will come from. I suppose we will have to lie down and die like other poor people after this."

"My good woman," said Elijah, "don't speak so despairingly for, as one of my wisest kings said of old : 'to him that is of the living there is hope.' No, go and do as you say but make me a little cake first and afterwards attend to yourself and your boy."

'Sir,' said she, more narrowly watching him, "you are not of many years, but you are so sweet of voice and gentle-mannered, that I will obey. I will not keep you waiting if you still will tarry here. Why not enter the city—you have

surely had sufficient rest for these few steps. My house is humble, none more so, but please to honor it, good sir."

Then the stranger had entered the lowly cottage and had eaten the portion of the fare, he said :

"You have cast your bread upon the waters, and will find it before many days. Your barrel of meal shall not waste, nor shall your bottle of oil fail until the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

In that house, Elijah stayed, and the scanty provision did not seem reduced at all, though another was added to the consumers. Meanwhile the son of the generous woman, who was a widow, had far from recovered from his wasting illness, but, on the contrary, approached nearer and nearer to death until the spirit faintly animating his emaciated frame seemed but the shadow of a soul. The poor grieving mother had had many opportunities to judge what kind of a man was her guest, who spent more time at his devotions than at anything else.

"Ah, man of God," moaned she, "is it by sheltering you that I have brought this evil on me? Oh, sir, sir, are you come to punish me and slay my poor son?"

But Elijah smiled sorrowfully, and only said :

"Let me have the youth."

He carried the sick one up into the upper room, where he lodged and, there placing him on his bed, he prayed long and earnestly.

"Oh, God, not for my little sake, but to prosper her who has sheltered me in thy honored name, may it be thy blessed will that the fleeting soul of this poor boy may rest and return."

The respectful supplication was listened to, and, from that day, the spirit coming again to the afflicted one he grew gradually better and could give thanks ere long for his recovery. The mother poured out her gratitude to the proph-

et and was only too deeply convinced of his being commissioned by a greater than earthly power. Many days passed. The famine was very severe both in Samaria and the borders. It was at the height, when starving people begged for quick death, that Elijah left the widow's house with many blessings on her son, and turned his steps into his native land. He sought audience of King Ahab, against the wishes of his friends, who feared that he would be killed for the royal resentment had not died away by lapse of time.

At the meeting of the sovereign and the prophet it seemed as if those who had cautioned the latter were right, for Ahab said fiercely :

"Ha! so thou art the dog who troublest Israel?"

"No, my lord, I am but a man. I do not trouble nor have I troubled my dear country. Nor have I spoken against it for ought that its unconscious earth has done. But heaven has made me cry out against wrong-doing, even when it comes from you and your royal house, King Ahab. You have deserted the proper path and tread with sinning steps that broad road which leads to the idols and iniquity. I told you, a long while since, that you and your realm would be visited by a failure of crops and a famine. Was that not a sufficient proof? But the Lord has vouchsafed another evidence that he is alone in His might."

"Let it be a sufficient one," said Ahab relenting, for he had found amid the sufferings which the royal household had had to endure from the drouth, that his richest presents had little affected his idols.

"Send out word and collect all Israel around Mount Carmel. Let then those so-called prophets of Baal and the flamens of the sacred groves, by whom your Queen Jezabel sets such great store, there confront me."

No harm was done to Elijah. The false ministers of the

image-worship did not dare do anything of themselves, for the bulk of the people, only too plainly convinced by his prophecy having been fulfilled in their own time and to their own pain, could not be made to disbelieve his holy mission.

In a week the tents of such people as could leave home were pitched on the plain around the eminence. The priests to the number of eight hundred and fifty were present and eager for the public test. They conceived that their united intellects would surely find some ingenious escape for them from any trial which the peasant Elijah's one untaught mind could devise. As the accuser, the latter was given the first hearing. He stood up on the height before the innumerable audience.

"My countrymen, my friends, my brothers," said he, in a feeling voice which was loud enough to reach the edge of the assemblage, "how long will you halt between two opinions? If you believe that the Lord God whose goodness to Moses, Abraham, Israel and our fathers, is the One, follow Him. If you rather choose Baal, a new god who is of a few years, a mere child of power, if he had any, or was, follow him. I am come to give you a last choice."

No one answered a word.

"You think, peradventure, that my Lord is but a weak One, because here I stand single-handed against these nine hundred. To me as prophet are four hundred and fifty, to me as follower of a true God are four hundred and over besides. But I challenge this god of human make, I the man of the people, who am alone against the hundreds of rich and noble.

"Listen. Let two bullocks be brought here. Let these priests choose one, which they will slaughter and dress and place for sacrifice on the altar. But put no fire underneath. Then will I take the other animal and prepare him,

and I will not approach it with fire. Let us call severally on our gods, they on their many, I on my One, and the God who can answer with flame, is a God. Do I speak well?"

From all the wide expanse of collected people arose an unanimous shout:

"Elijah of Gilead, you speak well."

The priests agreed.

They selected a bullock, slew it with all the ceremonies, and placed it on the pile of wood on the altar, but were too carefully watched for them to have played a stratagem and silyly kindled their pile. Then they began to implore their gods; but in vain, of course, were all their wild dances, chants and prayers. All remained as ever up to noonday. The people, even the credulous, undeceived now, began to hoot and cry out against them and even mock the image to whom they had bowed down the past years.

"Louder! louder!" said the lookers-on, "awake your sleeping god! call him back for maybe he is on his travels!"

After noon, the priests became furious and they redoubled their incantations, dancing frantically, and cutting themselves till they bled, with knives and points of copper and steel. But the light of the descending sun alone fell on the meat. By this time, no one regarded them except to laugh at them and mock.

Then Elijah called out:

"Come nearer and lend me help, for the shades of night will surprise me, if I try to do all alone."

They approached almost gladly.

"This spot," continued he, "was once the site of an altar to the Lord."

"Yes," said twenty voices; "there are the stones yet at the corner of the vineyard wall. Hilod of Bithron used them to build with."



"Thanks, my friends. Who will help bring them here, where I stand," added the prophet, who had descended to the plain and halted at a spot commanded by the seat made for King Ahab and his wife, which latter had departed on seeing the failure of her friends the priests.

A hundred arms detached the rows and piles of stones and carried them to the place designated, where Elijah quickly reared the altar. Of twelve stones he formed it, one for each tribe. He set those who had sharp sticks and others who found implements, to digging a wide trench around the altar. In the meanwhile he had built the fire, and reverently laid upon it the offering of fresh meat.

"There are some dozen vats of the vineyard yonder," said he, "whoever owns them will lend them to the service of heaven. Take them, some of you, and bring them here full of water from the spring."

The huge vessels brim-full, were carried to the altar in wonder.

"Pour four of them on this pile," said Elijah to the amazement of all, king, priests and populace.

A number of eager hands lifted up the tubs and deluged with the fourfold stream the altar and its burden.

"Again, and again," said the prophet.

The water not only glistened on the quarters of the bullock, but soaked the firewood and ran down the fresh-built altar in such plenty as to damp the earth and fill up the trench. The eyes of all stared in mute amazement on the dripping pyre which was far from seeming unfathomable. They viewed the prophet in wonder, and the priests watched him with pity for his madness and joy that at least he would fail more completely than they. Through all he preserved his countenance unmoved, placid and smiling quietly.

At length all retired. It was light yet, and the sun's

rays slanted over the multitude, on the altars and on the King and priests. Elijah had knelt, and those near enough to him, heard him say confidently :

“ Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, may it be thy pleasure that this day it shall be shown that thou art God in Israel as over all the world, through me the very least of thy marvellous creations. Show, also, in thy graciousness, that I am not too lowly to be reckoned as one of thy servants, and that I have power to do these things purely and simply by thy favor. Hear me, hear me, good, my Lord, and let this people, descendants of the blessed, see that thou art the Almighty and the Only God.”

Was it that a passing sunbeam had met a sister on the drenched altar of twelve stones, and thus doubled its light? Could it, could it be that fire, from where except heaven, was bursting out all over that saturated table? Beyond a doubt, increasing every instant, a sheet of flame had sprung into existence there, and, after licking up the drops in the sand, and drinking the water in the channel encircling all, was now enkindling the wood it had already dried, and mingled with the hissing and white vapor of the steaming moisture, a crackling of wood and a cloud of the smoke from the roasting flesh.

The people were too much awed at first to make a sound or otherwise evince their feelings than to throw themselves on their faces. Then, after a pause, all cried :

“ Yes, yes, the Lord, the Lord is God.”

The priests of Baal, who had at stake, fortune and fame, and who were moved by shame and envy which overpowered their dread and astonishment at the marvel, rushed in among the kneeling people and endeavored to induce them to disbelieve what they themselves had to credit. But, at their very first words: “ A trick, a trick of this false prophet!” A fierce roar of indignation arose from those late their dunes.

"No, no, oh, liars! have we not seen! It is the Lord of our fathers!"

And, still the priests still persevering and even laying hands on the loudest of the new proselytes, one of them was struck to the earth. This fact removed the lingering shelter to their persons so recently supposed sanctified. They disappeared under the surging mass and never rose but when lifted, dead bodies. In a twinkling, no respect for King Ahab preventing, a number had flown to the altar of Baal and scattered it and his debased and shivered image to the winds by the light of the setting sun and the divine enkindled fire.

Thereupon, all having been done that the people could think of, they flocked back to Elijah, prepared to take his orders before those of their ruler even.

But the former had gone to the improvised throne and respectfully said to Ahab: "My Lord, you will do well to rise and prepare to return to the city, where you may feast, believing in the Lord, who has displayed a faint token of his immeasurable power just now. The drouth is ended, I hear the rain coming."

The people clapped their hands for joy, and shouted, while Elijah went up to the top of mount Carmel, where he knelt to pray. Six times he lifted up his head bowed in reverence, and looked down on the masses; they were scanning the horizon, clear, except that the sun was nearly down. But as the prophet raised himself a seventh time, as with one voice all cheerfully exclaimed, while they pointed with a thousand fingers at the horizon:

"See, see! oh, joy, joy, joy! the cloud, the rain-cloud."

In truth though no bigger than a man's hand at first, a black speck rose in the distance and extended its dark wings as it came looming up. The people packed up their tents and scattered over the plain into the towns and houses.

Elijah descended the eminence, and said to King Ahab :

“Hasten into your chariot and off! The like of the first day of our father Noah’s deluge comes!”

As he spoke he gathered up his long vestment and, tightening his girdle, ran on towards Jezreel, and he hurried at such a pace that he preceded the royal chariot and its two fleet horses, lashed with stout bullhide whips though they were, all the way.

The whole heavens had been over-clouded and the sun had glared red through a bank of blackness ere it went down. Some large drops had already fallen ere all were in shelter, but then the rain fell in sheets and masses, as it were, making the trees of the mountain quiver with gladness to have their shriveled leaves and scorched bark bathed since so long, making the empty beds of rivulets foam merrily to the highest brink, making the withered plants bow under profusion of welcome moisture, making Jordan swell its contracted breadth, and making the re-born people unite in a song of praise and thankfulness.

Despite the showers which washed the corpses of the false priests above ground on the plain beside their dethroned idol and its fractured altar, the celestial fire continued to burn until it had consumed all of the offering and the fluid. Its mysterious light was seen by the curious who tried to pierce, from their windows, the thick veils of falling rain.

But, if King Ahab and his people were overjoyed at the end of the dry weather, the queen, who was as much of an idolatress as ever, was enraged at the death of the priests, her favorites. Elijah heard that she had sworn : “May my gods forget me, if I do not make that prophet’s life even as those poor martyrs’ are.”

He knew that he could not trust the king, and he did not wish to bring harm upon anybody who might shelter him

hence he made all speed to Beersheba in Judah, where he left the one servant who had shared in his flight, and thence penetrated a day's march into the solitude. There he laid himself down under a juniper bush and fell asleep, while praying for his life to be taken away, for he believed he had done all that he could do and he was sick of being hunted like an animal. He dreamed that an angel placed something by the pillow he had made of a bunch of leaves and soft twigs, and had said: "Rise and eat!"

By the morning light, as he awoke, he saw a pitcher of water and a cake by his side. On them, he spent the first day. The next night, the same vision occurred again, and again the food was deposited; but the angel had added this time: "Eat and drink heartily, for you have a long journey before you to the sacred Mount Horeb."

By the strength of that supernatural provision, Elijah walked forty days and forty nights, by which time he had arrived on the level ground over which towered the Mount of God, Horeb. On the summit of it, he dwelt in a cave, and knelt in its entrance to pray for heaven to direct his future steps.

A great black storm obscured the sky and made the noon midnight, and with it roared a wind which came rolling on before it, shattered boughs wrenched from strongest trees and even huge rocks as a zephyr carries leaves, to shake the mountain itself. Increasing in force, it surged on and on till chaos seemed threatened again. Horeb rocked and made Elijah tremble with its motion as much as he trembled with the violence of the tempest. He had to stretch himself on the ground and hold on by shrubs. On the plain the sand was stirred up in banks, and in whirls ascended till, meeting one another, the columns mingled and fell before the blast. The trees bowed till near break-



ing, and rocks were torn from the heights to crash to the bottom and split to atoms.

In such a scene of commotion, in which the prophet felt what a mite he was to the Illimitable, he believed every moment that he would be addressed.

But the Lord was not in the swift coursing cloud, nor in the tumultuous wind.

After the simoom had wrecked almost everything in its passage, and let the fragments of ruin it had caused quiet themselves, a new terror was spread before Elijah's awed gaze. In a thousand places over the plain, the earth, first shivering and then heaving in agony, rent its bosom asunder and opened widely-gaping clefts. Poor animals, that had cowered to the dust at the storming of the tornado and had ventured out of cover in the succeeding calm, were swallowed up in the chasms abruptly yawning under them, and their yells, as they fell down, down, down through the pit without bottom, resounded fainter and fainter after they had long been lost to sight in the horrid depths. Whole sides of the chain of hills bordering the plain, unloosed by the earthquake, parted the connection of roots of trees with an almost human groan and shriek and, toppling over as though breasted forward by a giant, struck the shuddering flat beneath, like an immense hammer smiting a colossal anvil. Gulfs opened to receive the weight at the signal-shock, and let into their long-reaching and ample mouths the tons on tons of earth, trees and rocks. Crash and stroke, rending and snapping, rattling and crushing, swelled into depressing, overpowering clangor.

But the Lord was not in the earthquake.

Out of the hungry jaws of the split and wounded surface, still opening as if for more food, came tongues of flame of all hues which began to search the untouched ground.

The whole became a field of fire ploughed by shares of coruscated light. The heated smoke rose even to the top of Horeb and enveloped the praying prophet.

But the Lord was not in the fire.

Abyss after abyss was veiled and the precipices joined their edges. Destruction covered all the vestiges of its work that it could, and the racked plain ceased to moan its anguish. A deeper stillness than of old encompassed and overruled the scene. Not a single sound dared to reveal itself. The beasts were dead, entombed far underground in the healed gashes, or stifled by the vanished vapor. The birds had long before been swept away by the tornado. The silence might have been felt. Elijah ceased to breathe or murmur spoken prayers. In his mind noiselessly he formed his supplications.

In the very depth of the calm, these words floated to his ears, without breaking the silence so small and still was the Voice :

“What doest thou here, Elijah?”

“Forgive me, God, I have been over hasty, and have begged thee to take away the life thou didst give me. Forgive, forgive. But the Israelites have forgotten thee, and have slain thy people till I am the only prophet left. My life, too, is endangered.”

The Voice gave him counsel, and, in pursuance, Elijah proceeded to Damascus, where he was to anoint Hazael, King for Syria and Jehu for Israel, and choose Elisha of Abelmeholah as successor to him as prophet.

Meanwhile Benhadad, King of Syria, had made war against Samaria, the only condition he allowed for peace being that King Ahab should consent to do more than yield tribute, that is, let the Syrian choose whatever he pleased high or low, living or dead, in Samaria. This was too shameful to be submitted to, and an indignant response went back

by the Syrian messengers. They returned with his threat to King Ahab :

“ Tremble, foolish ruler. I come with a force which numbers more of the fearless and strong than there are handfulls of dust in Samaria.”

“ Tell your master,” said the King of Israel, “ that no one should cry till they are out of danger. He that puts on his armor to go into a fray, should not laugh as he may who discases himself a victor.”

This defiance came to Benhadad as he was feasting with his nobles in the royal tent, and he gave immediate orders for his troops to be set in array of battle.

But Elijah appeared before King Ahab and said. “ The Lord will give all that mighty army into your power. By that you will learn who is the true God. Not your whole force but only the sons of the princes of the provinces, shall go out against their multitude and make the onset.”

The sons of the viceroys were but two hundred and thirty, yet, inspired by the promise of Elijah, they did not hesitate to leave their friends and march dauntlessly towards the foes long line. The rest of the Israelites, seven thousand strong, prepared for an advance while watching them. Word came to Benhadad that a small party of the enemy approached, so small and so richly dressed that they were probably come to parley and submit and he, laughing, still revelling, at the table, said :

“ If they are only so few, do not draw bow or poise spear against them, but take them prisoners.”

Hence the little band of Israelites were left near the outposts. But, when a hundred rushed upon them to seize them, they were received so hotly that the survivors gave way. The princes followed them close by, smiting them as they ran, and entered the hostile lines at their backs. The rest of King Ahab's troops hurried on and took advan-

tage of the opening made to convert the surprise into a rout. The Syrians were utterly defeated, horse and foot, and Benhadad was hardly able to escape in a chariot during the melee.

The prophet amidst general rejoicing, advised Ahab to strengthen his army and not let the victory delude him into injurious ease, for the King of Syria would be up in arms against him by the next year. True enough, for the idea had spread chiefly from King Benhadad, through Syria that they had been so disgracefully defeated because they had fought with the Israelites on the high lands. They fancied that the Hebrew God, from their having daily remembered of Moses on mount Sinai, Elijah of late on Horeb and similar cases, had influence solely on events to occur on the eminences. So they reasoned, we will challenge them to fight us on the plains.

The Israelite monarch replied to the defiance that he was always ready to encounter them, on the burning sands or by the river's brink, on the hill top or in the valley, and moreover, that he, with his lesser force, would ask the Syrians to attack him with the same numbers as they had the six or eight months before. At the season, Benhadad, who had set a-field a body precisely the same as he had led one year ago, horse for horse, chariot for chariot, man for man, spread them over the country. They were confronted by two divisions of Israelites, whose disparity made the combatants appear like two flocks of goats facing herds on herds of cattle.

Elijah preached to Ahab's army and to him, bidding them keep courage in their hearts for the Great Commander who had marshalled them to victory months since was an Everlasting One, and that a year was but as a minute to Him. The false objects of worship might by chance or

cunning execute marvels, but the Inimitable alone could repeat His miracles.

"Remember," continued the prophet to Ahab, "that death awaits Benhadad as the earthly penalty of his having dared in his pride to judge the Omnipotent and confine his might to the high places of the whole earth that was moulded at His beck."

They fought for several days, Syrian and Israelite in turn prevailing. On the last day the right overcame the might, and a hundred thousand fell of Benhadad's bravest. The rest were hotly pursued to the city of Aphek, where their own numbers so shook the street along the wall that it gave way and crushed many thousands of them. Benhadad and a few of his captains took refuge in this town, having escaped suffocation in the press.

"If we seek to flee farther," said the ruined monarch, "we can scarcely avoid capture, for all the horses are disabled by the long conflict, and the country in our rear is up in arms against our retreat. We cannot make a stand here, for the wall that fell leaves too much space open. We have heard that the Kings of Israel are merciful. Let you present yourselves to this Ahab and beg mercy."

So they, in their beaten armor, having sackcloth about their middles and halters around their necks to show complete submission, appeared before the victor. He, forgetting or unheeding the divine sentence, consented to receive the vanquished ruler to whom he gave safe conduct. With him, in their interview, he made a treaty.

Then Elijah went to meet Ahab by the way, having painted his face to disguise it with fire-ashes. He called on the king to stop and hear him.

"My master," he said in a feigned voice, "I demand judgment of your wisdom. I was in the battle lately



where the Lord blessed your royal arm. A comrade who had taken a captive, was near me. He gave the prisoner to me, saying: 'Keep this man—if he is missing you will have to answer for him with your life?' I agreed. The prisoner, I afterwards allowed to escape. Now, my king, what punishment do I deserve?"

"That which you agreed to receive if you were faulty. Not you; but he alone who placed trust in you, can alter the sentence."

Then Elijah wiped the ashes from his face and stood revealed.

"Oh, King, if the man was guilty who broke faith given to his fellow man, what shall be said of you, who broke the pledge given to God above. The Lord saith: inasmuch as you have let the doomed Benhadad free, your life shall answer in his stead, your people for his people."

Ahab was more grieved than angry, and he let the prophet leave him unharmed.

Soon after, it happened that Ahab coveted a fine vineyard, that belonged to a Jezreelite named Naboth and he was incensed because the owner would neither give it to the King nor sell it at any price whatever. The monarch took the disappointment so much to heart that he would eat nothing. His Queen, the wicked Jezebel, could not help noticing his mental ailment and having discovered the cause, laughed her malicious, ill-boding laugh.

"Why, Ahab, husband," said she with flashing eyes "is it you that reign over this kingdom? Weak monarch must a feeble woman teach you. Rise, eat cakes and drink of the muddy dancing wine out of your favorite gold cup. Be merry, while you listen to my plan to give you the obstinate fellow's vineyard."

Next day the chief men of Jezreel received script under

the royal seal detailing a project and giving orders which they delayed not to accomplish.

A few days afterwards, the people of that part were called upon to keep a feast day, and Naboth, as a farmer of note, was placed high among the presidents of the festival. In furtherance of the conspiracy thereupon, two hirelings demurred at his elevation and accused him loudly of having blasphemed King Ahab and God whom they were assembled to praise. The indignant people hardly listening to wretches swearing to this lie, fell upon Naboth and chased him out of the town, where they threw stones at him till he died, according to the ancient law. As soon as this crime was done, and Jezebel had been informed, she told her husband, who hastened to go into the country and seize the coveted land, to which there was no heir except the crown.

In the rich vineyard the king was strolling. He had the estate now at his feet, and yet he was less happy than when he had been separated from it by only a just man's life, a little barrier but a high one when grievous offense has to overstep it. He dared not pluck one of the once so-desired grapes, for the purple juice was as the innocent blood. He hated to see the bed, the chairs, the dishes and cups, which so recently were the murdered man's. The stones he walked on reminded him of the ghastly heaps of such pebbles which a misled mob had hurled upon the guiltless. The vine-twigs dryly snapping under his feet, seemed echoes of the broken bones of the victim, happier with them bleaching in the sun and under the obloquy of his deceived friends than the living deceiver was. King Ahab detested the place, and turned to hurry back to the house, where were his servitors, and thence hasten to his palace. As he turned, the shadow of another man than he blackened the path. It was the last person he expected to see, the last

he would have wished to see : Elijah the prophet, with his grave and holily-illumined face.

"Ha!" cried the king, glad to cover the dread he felt in that prototype of the field of blood-money, with wrath, "so again my enemy finds me? Not content to trouble at hours of audience, he must come to vex my pleasure."

"I have found you. I am come to you because you have agreed to do evil against an innocent creature of God, who promises by my humble lips this doom against you. King Ahab, you and yours shall be like the families of all who have wrought wickedness. In the very place where the pure life-stream of Naboth was licked up by dogs, your royal but guilt-blackened blood shall be given to the beasts. And Jezebel shall eat by Jezreel's walls! her name alone shall live to be cursed to the hundredth generation."

Ahab's pride and anger, which had flushed his cold cheek, faded away before so chilling and piercing a denunciation. He feared, too, the power of heaven, which had been displayed on his thankless behalf. He waved the prophet to leave him and he reeled with tear-streaming eyes and covered face, into the house of his sinful obtaining. He clad himself in sackcloth, poured dust on his head, fasted and, indeed, repented to his heart. And as heaven, be the criminal however steeped in misdeeds, is as full of mercy to the vilest as to the purest, for it is even more just than just, perfect above perfection, the judgement was delayed, only to be executed three years after, during the new war between Syria and Israel.

Ahab had relapsed, under the speeches of Queen Jezebel, and he had so far believed that he had escaped the divine condemnation that he shut up in prison one who foretold his death, on the eve of his going out to battle at Ramoth of Gilead. To prevent the irresistible sentence, he disguised himself, for he had heard that the King of Syria had

especially commanded his men to pick Ahab out from his host. So the fight went on, without any but the Israelites knowing that their king was still among them though out of place. But in vain, naturally, were his precautions, for an arrow shot unaimed in the thick of the onslaught, pierced him under his gorget and snapped its head off in the great wound. His officers advised him not to be taken out of the combat then, as his presence was of value at so critical a moment, and three of his attendants held him up in his chariot, faint for loss of blood. It ran down copiously under his breastplate, which they dared not unclasp, and coated the sides and bottom of the car. He died as the sun went down in a sky reddened like the bloody field. As his ears closed in death, he heard the Israelites, showing all was lost, cry out: "Every man to his home!"

They brought the slain monarch to Samaria and buried him there. Some happened to call to mind Elijah's prediction, and they laughed to think that Ahab was sepulchred without the dogs having tasted of his blood. While they were thus considering that the word of God had come to nothing, it was really being fulfilled. For the servants had taken the royal war-chariot down to the pond to wash it, and had left it near the gates of Jezreel, where they entered to the centre of groups of friends eager to hear of the battle from the lips of those fresh from its heart. The wild dogs, which prowled around the market place and the shambles, scented the blood upon the car, and, not afraid of the horses, gathered around. Bolder and bolder they grew till some even entered the body by the low steps behind, and then, inside and out, wherever the blood had gushed, spattered or been sprinkled on the chariot, the dogs applied their tongues. The prediction was carried out to the letter, in act and place.

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab in heart as by birth, ascended

the throne in turn, acknowledging as superior to him only the false god Baal. Hence, on his suffering from a severe fall he had had out of his window, where he had fallen asleep one afternoon, he sent to the god of Ekron, Baalzebub to make presents to his image and inquire of his soothsayers whether he would recover.

But the messengers were encountered on the way by Elijah, who bade them retrace their steps and take his words to their master.

"My lord the king," said they, to explain their so abrupt return, "we met a strange man, aged, wild-looking and begirt with a strap of hide, who told us to say this to you : "The Lord, because you have dared to think of Baalzebub the false before the only and true God, declares that you shall never quit your bed alive !"

Ahaziah was in as much anger as pain, and he hastily despatched a captain with fifty men to discover the insolent man, whom he suspected to be the same Elijah who had been the galling thorn to his father, and kill him under pretence of meaning to bring him to him the king. The soldiers found Elijah on top of a hill.

"Oh man of heaven," said the captain in no little fear, for he was an old man who knew of the prophet's former deeds, "pardon me, but I must do my duty. The King commanded me to bring you before him."

He made an advance, climbed the hill with his followers

"If I am thought by you to be a man of heaven," said Elijah, you should not have undertaken such a task. You continue—well! May fire from heaven be the death of you and yours."

Lightnings circled around the prophet, and stretched dead, as they clambered, the fifty men, and the captain, except two or three who had hesitated and who had ran away with the tidings. But the King would not believe the tale,



and ordered another officer with a similar troop to make haste and seize the man who had offered resistance to the royal mandate. These found the prophet in the same place, and, on beholding the dead bodies of their commanders around the base of the hill, blue and lived with the unearthly flame that had blasted them, instead of being appalled, they were spurred on by the sight, and, with fierce shouts and oaths, and menaces with their weapons, they made a rush up the steep. Elijah sat where he was, unmoving, except that his lips modulated a prayer.

As before lightnings flashed out and shot upon the soldiers' deadly points, paralyzing their hands by alighting on their swords and causing their death. One escaped, who had been holding his officer's horse on the plain, and who threw himself on its back to gallop off in terror with the news. But Ahaziah, no wise foiled in his determination, sent a third company, who, however, were only to seize the prophet and bring him into the royal presence. The captain of the party was a God-fearing man, and the destruction of his predecessors was a lesson he would not have required. He respectfully ascended the acclivity alone, having commanded his men to halt, and fell upon his knees before Elijah.

"Oh, man of heaven," he besought, "let my life, as well as those of the fifty men over whom I am set, be precious in your eyes and not things of nothing as were the hundred of my late companions in arms who lie below, dead by celestial bolts. Let my life be more than theirs, and come willingly before my master, for I give you my word not a hand shall be lifted against you, or let me return to be punished for disobedience."

Elijah descended and went with him to the king. When before him, he repeated what he had already transmitted to him by his own messengers.

According to the Word, Ahaziah died in his bed of the fall.

Elijah had not lived like common men nor did he die like such. In the sight of his companion Elisha, who was to inherit his spirit of prophecy, the man, who had served in the cause of heaven from his earliest days amid sharp persecution and painful deprivations, with unvarying purity and devotion, was swept up from the earth in a car of fire and by the breath of a whirlwind.

*ELISHA.*

THERE was a youth the son of Shaphat a farmer of Abelmeholah, who while obeying his parents' and his elders' commands, had never forgotten or failed to obey the higher commandments on Moses' tables of the law. And so he grew up.

One day he was ploughing a newly bought piece of land of his father. It had never been tilled and he had twelve yoke of oxen to the plough, and even that number with difficulty made the furrow in the matted and packed earth. He was making the turn at the end of the line, and was holding the heads of the leaders' when an old man, passing by the road paused and stopped him in his labor. They exchanged names, when, no sooner had Elisha heard that the stranger was the revered Prophet Elijah than, bowing respectfully, he besought him to come into his father's house and be entertained as he merited.

"My young friend, this is my heaven-sent order which does not permit any delay. I am to tell you that, when I shall have departed my life, you, even you—be not astonished, for, in truth you have pleased Him you serve—are to succeed me. In token, see!"

And he enrobed him for the moment in his traveling-cloak. He would have gone on, thereupon, but Elisha retained him.

"Let me only run and kiss good bye to my father and mother, and then I will follow you where you will."

"Nay, nay, go back to your oxen. I have no need of you."

Elisha let him go, but, instantly going home, he sacrificed a yoke of oxen on a fire of their own goads, poles and yokes and feasted his friends. He bade all farewell, and made haste to overtake Elijah, with whom he remained ever after, through all the changes of the crowned heads of Judah and Israel. Happy in confidence, happy in belief, happy in hope, his early years passed, though many were the persecutions and afflictions which his new life attracted to him from the worshippers of idols and haters of pure religion. His first real sadness, for he would have had to be much more than man to have felt unmoved, was when his old companion told him that he was soon to quit earth. He saw with how painful a grief it filled Elisha and hence, to spare him the sight of his dissolution, he begged to be let go alone from Gilgah.

"Elijah my father," said Elisha, "we have been together too long for us to part now, if ever. Have I had too much of your wise and holy company, heaven forbid."

So he would be his partner to one place, and then to another, and finally to the River Jordan. Some fifty of their scholars had escorted them at a more than respectful distance. At the bank, Elijah stopped.

"My friend, I cross here."

"And I, if I may, master. I will not leave you."

"If the Master wills, not I, Elisha. See!"

As he spoke, the old prophet took his mantle, rolled it up like a mace and began to lash the waters of the wide-bosomed stream. The waves divided as they had done at the advance of the sacred ark ages before to let Joshua's people cross by the dried bed. By the same road, being made by his cloak, Elijah led his fearless, confiding compan-

ion across, between two walls of foaming, surging waves, to the opposite bank.

"Before I am taken away from you, for I know my end approaches," said Elijah, "ask what I shall do for you."

Elisha was silent for a space, and he regarded now the river, now the fair landscape, but mostly the sky.

"I would do my portion of holy work on the earth," said he, "I am too weak to do what I wish of myself."

"You have asked much," said Elijah, shaking his head, "and yet I would have liked, you not so much had you desired less. As far as I a man, can promise, it is yours, but such power must be implanted only in the hearts that our Lord has prepared. Let this be the proof of your fitness. If you see the celestial bearer of me from earth, your eyes are surely unsealed, and you are my successor."

They prayed in concert, and, imitating them on the other side of the Jordan running as ever, the disciples bowed the knee.

"All of a sudden the grasshoppers and crickets ceased to chirp, the birds hurried with quicker wing to refuge, a stillness of the air ensued in which the sound of one blade of grass striking another would have been heard. There sprang up a noise no louder than a honey bee's trumpet at first, but rapidly growing in immensity of sound, till, in all its overpowering might, a whirlwind surged upon the praying pair. The disciples looked up at the sound, but only saw a circling cloud of sand, leaves, dust, forming a column from the ground to the clouds. As they looked it was gone.

Elisha was alone.

He had seen a chariot as a golden flame, on fiery wheels, and drawn by winged steeds more than matchless for beauty on earth, and angels guided them with lily-bands for reins. Elijah, swept into it by the tempest, was carried off in a moment.



The storm was over as abruptly as it came.

The mantle of Elijah had fallen from him doubtlessly designedly. It was taken up reverently by Elisha, who beat back Jordan and crossed by the dried up path he made, saying ;

"Be mine, oh, Lord God of Elijah, gone to the saints' reward."

The disciples, murmuring : "The spirit of Elijah is in his friend," hurried to meet him as he touched the bank and as the cloven sheet reunited and dashed forward as before, and to salute him.

"Let us go, on," they said, "in search of Elijah, for mayhap the spirit of the Lord has only conveyed him to some other part of the country."

It was a long while before Elisha yielded to this wish, for he was too deeply convinced of the completeness of his friend's departure to realms above, but as he saw they would set about the search at even the cost of his displeasure, he sanctioned the desire. But, gallop and run as the fifty and their friends did from place to place far over the country on either edge of the stream, not a sign did they find of the prophet. He was, beyond doubt, forever spirited away. Three days search was so much time lost. Elisha had stayed so long at Jericho, where they came to report their non-success. He had only waited to see them convinced and was about to depart.

"Oh, master, dear master," said the scholars appealingly, "do not go elsewhere, where evil may attend you. Stay here with us who love you, wise and dear one, the city is in a pleasant place and has but the one defect, a lack of good water."

"Nay, here, at my feet," said Elisha, "I see a spring most abundantly flowing, and its waters swell into quite a

brook ere they reach the city's wall. You are surely in error to speak of want of water."

"Of good water, master most honored," said one, "we stand corrected. This stream is as disagreeable as plentiful. It even blasts the land, see how its banks are far from fringed with vegetation."

"As it is not, it shall be," said Elisha, "for the hospitality given for no reward, shall be repaid. Give me," continued he looking around, "ah, yes, is it not salt that Haburim has in his wallet?"

"My master, it is salt, new and fresh dried from the sea. I was keeping it for my sick brother's cattle as a sort of delicacy for them, poor beasts. They have not been out to pasture since he took to his bed."

"Well, give it me."

The bag was put readily into the prophet's hands which, one holding the receptacle, the other removing the contents, sprinkled the salt into the spring, only a few steps from them.

"Bitter and blasted waters," said he, "which have made barren the land, be healed and carry fertility and felicity throughout your course, in place of death and harm."

With this blessing given, he went to Bethel, in whose valley Jacob had set up his stone pillow for a memorial of the vision which he had there had. Elisha before ascending the hill, stopped to rest as well as to watch some children who were merrily playing under oaks sprung up perhaps from the seed of the tree beneath which aged Deborah had been buried. He had first smiled to see the youths enjoying themselves so heartily, for the prophet, though a man of years, of study and of gravity, ever loved childhood as its usual purity demanded, but presently his countenance assumed a saddened expression. The wicked little fellows,

in imitation of their fathers, had really made a pile of stones for an altar in front of the blackened stump of a lightning blasted tree, which bore some resemblance to the human form with its two charred boughs for arms. One of them was bringing a torch, a brand taken from the oven of his parent's house close by, and was about to kindle the wood, while half a dozen more, laughing, were trying to kill a poor little puppy which vainly bit with its tiny teeth, writhed and scratched to get away from their feeble mis-directed cuts.

In a moment, Elisha had turned and reached the group, where the mere waving of his walking staff made the alarmed tormentors drop the dog, which, bleeding in four or five places, ran away yelping, and the firebrand, on which Elisha put his foot for fear its flames might spread from the grass to the grove. While he overturned the pile of wood and the rude altar, the boys, who had scampered off, had re-assembled and, though they had sufficient respect for his venerable look not to pelt him with stones, they hurled on him all the epithets gross and insulting that they had already learnt. Their noise gave the prophet no opportunity to explain his conduct and seek to convert their hearts so early sin-steeped. They would not approach him for fear of his intending treachery and beating them.

Elisha turned and proceeded on his way. The children grew emboldened at his retreat, and raised their voices all the louder in taunts and cries. They followed him thus to the foot of the hill, when as his back was turned to them, they did not hesitate two or three of them, to gain the applause of their playfellows, to fling bits of bark, sticks and even flint and stones at him. Several struck him but had their force dulled by hitting his cloak; one stone, by chance directed, threw off his turban to the ground. This,

by uncovering the venerable head, afforded the party, a little frightened at what they had done, fresh food for sport.

"Go on, old bald-head!" cried all voices. "Go up, go up, bald-head!"

Elisha turned to pick up his turban, and he spoke against them in the name of heaven.

Two she-bears, preying about for provision for their cubs, appeared at the margin of the wood. The children and the beasts perceived one another at the same time. The former, with shrieks and screams filling the air that had lately rung with their mockery and irreverence ran away. The animals followed, and ravenously killed forty and more of them, before the villagers could collect and beat off the hunters of their children.

Elisha was at Gingal, teaching, when, a dearth being in the land, there was a failure of provisions. As there were more scholars gathered to him than he had expected, his little stock of food was speedily exhausted. As they were willing, however, to be content under any deprivations if they could enjoy his wisdom, they were in the habit of taking soup, for which they collected the vegetables themselves. One of the young men, in collecting, had picked the fruit of a poisonous wild vine, which was cut up in the kettle with the wholesome herbs. They had hardly taken a spoonful each than their throats and lips were burnt and blistered, and they suffered acute pain. The more hasty were on the point of upsetting all into the fire, when Elisha appeared to ask the reason of the outcries and the strange actions.

"O master, there is death in the pot!"

It was explained to him, when he took a handful of common bruised corn, and sprinkled it in the preparation.

"Pour out now," said he, "and you will see that no harm will ensue, and that you who are unfortunately in pain, will be immediately relieved."

He was partaking with them, when a rider, richly attired, called for him.

It appeared that King Jehoram, of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah, had combined to punish the King of Moab, who had refused to render his promised and customary tribute. The chief of the Edomites also allied himself with the two former and gave them passage through his territory. Now, there were seven days that they had been marching through the sands of Edom without having met any water, and the suffering troops, their provision being exhausted, were in some cases slaying the camels for the water in their second stomachs.

"Alas!" said Jehoram, "to think that we are growing weaker and weaker daily only to be children in the hands of Moab."

Jehoshaphat before desponding utterly, wished to consult a prophet and hence it was that Elisha was brought before them. Elisha answered, not to obey or to please the King of Israel who was an evil doer, but to give pleasure to the King of Judah who was a man of piety and intelligence. And inasmuch as he would not himself foretell before an infidel like Jehoram, he ordered a minstrel to be his interpreter.

So while the harper was playing and singing some idle song he suddenly changed the theme and chanted solemnly :

"Thus saith the Lord, prepare in this valley so bleached and scorched many ditches to enclose your men. Nor shall ye see rain, saith the Lord, but, nevertheless, this hollow shall be filled with water, by which ye and yours and your cattle may drink. And as this is a little thing for the All-powerful, He will, over and above that, deliver the King of



Moab into your hands, for the sake of his righteous leavened in among your hosts, and for the sake of the punishment that should befall Moab. And ye are to destroy his nests of evil idolatry, his chief cities and lesser towns, saith the Lord the God !”

As the inspired harper fell down in a swoon and was only revived with exceeding care, Elisha confirmed the speech. At dawn, when the meat offering was made, a great sheet of water, like the Salt Sea moving for size, poured on, washing all before it, into Edom and converted the level ground into one lake of many branches. The army had done well in throwing up embankments during the night. Many of the companies had prudently encamped on the hillsides.

In the meantime, the Moabites had got together their forces and had marched during the early hours of morning to surprise the allies. The sun shone on the water in the distance, and as they saw it blush with the auroral streakings, they, unable to attribute the unexpected sight to the real and simple cause, hastened to suppose that the confederates had quarrelled and taken to arms, and that this was the blood.

“On, on, Moab! they have slain one another, to us the spoil!” was the war-cry, as in disorder they rushed on to be doubly undeceived, for the enemy was a-stir and met their greedy front as quickly as it stopped on seeing it was merely a flood before them, and so savagely that the Moabites fled at the charge. They were chased into their own country, whose strong places as well as the weak fell into the grasp of the combined forces.

One of the daughters-in-law of a faithful follower of God, becoming very poor, applied for relief to the only person she knew, Elisha.

“My master,” said she, “my husband, no less a good servant of you than of heaven, is dead. He owed a certain

man some money and I cannot begin to pay it. The creditor threatens to take away my two boys as bondmen."

"I am poor myself as regards money," returned Elisha "Have you nothing at home?"

"Nothing, except a jar of olive oil, which would sell for no price worth mention."

"Enough. Go and borrow of your neighbors—one so worthy as you must have kind ones—all the empty vessels you can, and, when you have them all in your house, shut the doors and begin to fill them, with the help of your sons."

"I believe in you, my master."

"Believe in heaven, rather."

The woman collected all the jars, pitchers, tubs, and bottles that she could obtain, and shut herself up in her house with her sons. She began to pour from her little pot, when its contents overflowed a bucket thrice its size. So, with another and another trial, until all the vessels were full. She hurried, on that, to Elisha to tell him.

"Go sell the oil," said he, "and pay the debt. Live with your sons on the balance. Remember the poor who have no miracles performed for them on this earth."

There was a woman of Shunam at whose house Elisha had lived once upon a time, whose son fell ill to death. She remembered him after all the physicians had pronounced their worst apprehensions, and begged her husband to let her apply to the prophet. She was let have her own way, and she rode with a servant—for her husband was a man of property—to Mount Carmel, where Elisha was then dwelling.

The latter saw her in the distance, and he hurried to send his servant to meet her and ask news of her, for he believed she was merely passing by. But she continued to ride towards him, and, when she had dismounted near him, she ran forward and threw herself down at his feet. Elisha's

servant would have removed her, but he prevented him, saying :

"'Tis my good friend of Shunam. Let her be. The Lord has hid her trouble from me. Is it not well with you ? your husband ? your child ?"

"It is well, master, with all your servants, except my boy. He is sick, he is perhaps dead at this hour. Oh, I won't leave you, holy man, unless you will restore him life and health. I mean—oh, I am wild with grief!—I mean—oh, do help him, my poor boy ! I have no right to ask you, but I know heaven will hear you, when my sinful prayers are unworthy its listening."

"Gehazi," said the prophet to his attendant, "run on before, with my staff. Here ! and lay it on the child."

The woman and Elisha followed the man. They met him returning when near Shunam.

"'Tis no use," said he, shaking his head. "I laid the staff on him, but he neither breathed nor moved. He is dead !"

"Wait," said Elisha, amid a fresh outburst of the mother's grief.

He made all leave the death chamber, while he prayed over the boy, lifeless indeed. Gradually the clay-cold corpse grew warm to his touch and the faintest of breaths just perceptibly moved the youthful breast and lips. The child awoke to life. Then Elisha called in his servant and made him admit the mother, she had no sooner kissed her living son, than she fell on her knees to render thanks. Her husband and his household would have feasted Elisha, but he would receive none of the glory which belonged to above.

Naaman, the general of the armies of Syria, was a man beloved of heaven because he had done all he could for the right that had come within his sphere. He was afflicted with leprosy, that dreadful disease of the East. Above all

his pleasure at being a renowned warrior, a respected man, a mighty lord, a favorite with the King, was this burden upon him, crushing out all perfect happiness.

It happened that in one of the campaigns against the Isrealites, he had prevented one of his brutal soldiers killing a poor little girl, who had tried to save her father, and had kept her as his own captive, giving her to his wife, who brought her up with kindness. She had often heard her mistress mourning for her husband's misery and, at last, the little girl, eager to repay good with good as far as in her power lay, said :

"My good mistress, how I wish master dear were in Samaria. He could surely be cured of his sickness, by a great prophet of our God who lives there. Elisha they call him. He is as great as the Elijah who—you must have heard of it—was taken up to heaven so that nobody at all ever saw him more."

"Are you sure that this man has any power?" asked the Syrian woman, leaping eagerly at the hope.

"Oh, yes, in every body's mouth is some story of his wonders."

"Oh, that is all, then, thank you," said her mistress, letting her countenance fall, for there were but too many false prophets in our days, about whom many narratives circulate. So Elisha is great by fables handed from one to another with enlargements."

"No, my good mistress," said the girl, "why, my father took me with him from Baalshallsha where we lived—but I musn't cry, must I, mistress? when they're all gone and you are so good to me? Well, my father took some presents to Elisha and this little bit was enough and to spare for more than a hundred people."

"Tell me how?" said Naaman's wife, all attention.

"Ah, that I can't, my lady," replied the little one simply,

"this is all I saw, if you please. My father had five loaves of nice bread of the first ripened corn, twenty loaves of barley, and some of the biggest ears in the husk. Elisha thanked him—oh, he was so good though he was so old—I wasn't frightened a bit, for all I was very small, then—and he handed all to his servant, telling him to feed the people. Now there was ever so many people crowding around listening to Elisha, for he was speaking so beautifully of the things of Zion—but I forgot, you are not of us. Forgive me, my lady——."

"Go on, child, go on. No offence, of course."

"There was more than a hundred people there, and, I am sure, what dear father brought wasn't more than he and my mother and I could have eaten. The prophet's servant, who ought to have known better, looked twice and said: 'What, master, set this before a hundred folks?' 'Yes,' said Elisha, looking up for a moment, (I thought) to heaven, 'give it them, and I would that it were the bread of life, for with it they shall be satisfied. They shall eat the bread to their full.' And my lady, I saw it with my own little eyes—the servant broke and broke, and gave and gave, till all had a piece in their hands, and there were crumbs for the poor dogs still in our little basket. This is the least of his doings my mistress. Would you not like dear master to see the prophet?"

The wife hastened to speak to her husband, he, influenced and willing to grasp at a straw of recovery, begged to be permitted to have leave of absence for the visit. The King of Syria, to whom so faithful a servant was endeared, hastened to recommend him with a complimentary tablet to the King of Israel.

The latter read: "Now when this letter shall come and find you, brother king, in the health and with the hope of a long and happy life that we of Syria wish you, we would



pray you to have my servant Naaman, the bearer, cured of his leprosy."

"As the Lord liveth," exclaimed the king of Israel in sorrow, for he did not understand, "my brother of Syria must be only desirous of finding cause of a quarrel with me. He cannot really suppose me the King of heaven and able to heal the incurable!"

Naaman explained, and on the news reaching Elisha he sent to the king. "Let the general visit me. He shall find there is one prophet in Israel."

Without delay Naaman rode to Elisha's dwelling in his chariot. The prophet would not come out to him but gave Gehazi, his servant, these words to transmit:

"Your cure, through heaven, will be thus: Go bathe seven times in the river Jordan, and sin no more."

Naaman was angry.

"By my father's sword, my own blade now! is this what they call a prophet?" sneered he. "Why I thought he would come out, at least, and see me, wave his hands over me and call loudly on the God he worships. Why, we have our Damascene rivers Arbana and Pharpar, I might as well have bathed in them both and been doubly cured."

But his followers reasoned with him, "Good, my master, would you not have obeyed the prophet if he had required a hard task? Yes? How much more willingly should you do his will when he speaks simply."

He asked pardon for his hasty speech, yielded, and was drawn to the river, wherein he had scarcely laved himself, indeed, than he was well. As eager to retrieve his first ingratitude as to show his present thankfulness, he hurried round to the house and insisted on seeing Elisha.

He poured out his gratitude to him, and said:

"Before all, I feel that the God of all is that of Israel. Let me reward His minister."

"No," returned Elisha, "nothing do I receive. Prove your gratitude by godly deeds. You owe much, pay much."

"Let me ask another favor, then," entreated Naaman; "May I have two mule-loads of earth from this path you daily tread, oh, man of God? I will never worship by libation or oblation any other gods. The Lord of Israel is mine henceforth. But as I go with my master into the idol's temple and will have to bow as he does, may I have pardon for so doing? Will the Lord pardon me?"

"Your heart not being in it, yes, it is to be hoped. Go in peace," said Elisha, returning into his house.

Naaman rode off. Gehazi the servant was tempted.

"My foolish master won't receive any gift from this rich man who could easily give and not miss. Why should I let the Syrian go untolled? But I'll run after and make all up with him."

So saying, he hurried after the slowly-drawn chariot. Naaman saw him, and he ordered the horses to be stopped.

"Is all well?" said he anxiously.

"Oh, yes, quite, thank you. But my master sent me because an unexpected thing has happened. Two of his scholars have just arrived from Mount Ephraim, and he is desirous of properly entertaining them. Let me have for him and them a talent of silver and two suits of clothes."

"With all my heart," returned the Syrian, "and all the more readily as I have such things as presents for him, which he would not take. But not one talent of silver, but two, you shall have. No remonstrances."

With that, he had two of his outriders loaded with the garments and with two bags of silver, and, accompanied by Gehazi, the Syrians retraced their steps to the house of the prophet. At the door the false servant took the gifts

and sent the bearers away. He hid the things in his room and went in to his master the same as ever.

"Where have you been, Gehazi?" inquired Elisha.

"Nowhere, master," said he blushing.

"Oh, false one in act and word, did I not watch you from the tower? Here it is a time when war is threatened with Syria, and you receive presents from the enemy! For that and your perfidy, Naaman's disease is henceforth yours!"

Such numbers had been let study under Elisha that they sadly embarrassed him to find lodging for them at his house. They saw this, and offered to build an extension themselves so as to spare him expense. Elisha went, with the party to the River Jordan, where they cut down trees. It chanced that, as one man was shaping out a beam, the head of his axe flew off the handle, struck a stone by the water's edge and bounded off into the stream. The workman expressed great sorrow at the mishap for the implement had been borrowed. Elisha asked to be shown the site of the axe's disappearance, where, on learning it, he threw a stick. The iron floated up to the top of the water and there kept itself beside the stick as buoyant as a cork. So it was easily recovered.

The war broke out between Syria and Israel. The king of the latter country, one day, had given orders for the camps to be in certain places, when Elisha sent word, from Dothan on the border of Samaria, that the Syrians intended to occupy the same points and were too strong for him to attempt to dislodge them. Hence the Israelites foiled their enemies' plans.

The King of Syria collected all his confidants and generals and, in anger, said that one of them must be a traitor, or how could his most secret designs miscarry against Israel. One of the officers hastened to assure him that they

all were faithful for it was Elisha the Prophet who had told the King of Israel what were his foe's private intentions : This Elisha who had done so much harm, was, even then, at Dothan and a sudden dash might be made on that place and he seized, the officer went on to say. In consequence, the enraged king urged, too, by the necessity of so dangerous a person being secured, ordered away a large force.

Elisha's new servant had risen early, and the first thing he saw, was a circle of troops around about the city. He hurried in to his master.

"The news in the street, master," said he, "is that you are the object of the array. I fear the citizens will seize you and deliver you up to save themselves."

Elisha thought this probable, and, to save the townspeople, he and his servant went through to the gates and out on the plain.

"Alas, master, what shall we do, for see, in fifty yards more we shall be at their outposts."

"Fear not. We have more with us than all their masses."

The attendant's eyes being unveiled, he saw that Elisha was environed by charioteers and horsemen of fire, who filled the plain and the mountain around and behind the Syrians.

At Elisha's prayer, the latter were to a man smitten with blindness. As they groped about, thus each for his neighbor, Elisha went boldly up to the leaders and offered to lead them. He did guide them, they huddling together to feel and hear one another, in their affliction, if they could not see. The prophet conducted the whole force, man and horse, over the Samarian country to the army of Israel, where he restored them sight as suddenly as it had been removed. They were all made prisoners, for, at Elisha's wish they were spared. Such an act of generosity and the fear all felt

of a man of such power prevented any more contests that year.

But the next season King Benhadad of Syria made so immense an irruption that he drove all the Israelites from the open country into the walled towns. The fields were uncultivated, of course, and a great famine fell on the land. In Samaria, the capital city where the most provision had been laid up, the want of food was so great that the head of a dead horse sold for eighty pieces of silver. People even ate the corpses of their own blood, slain sons and fathers, starved wives and daughters. It was horrible.

Elisha had incurred the enmity of the king because he had given counsel, really wise, but unfathomable to the royal mind, which advice had led to the troops being besieged instead of encountering the foe in the field. A man was sent to kill him but he made him return to the king to say: "Hold your murderous project, which I have divined. For the sake of the suffering people, heaven has decreed that, so plenty shall be the eatables to-morrow, flour of the finest and picked barley shall go a begging."

The king was tempted to believe, for he knew how truthful the prophet was, but all his court laughed, and one lord said: "Such a wonder might be, if windows were to open in the sky and grain fall through." For which doubt, Elisha said: You shall see this plenty, but shall not partake.

That same afternoon, Elisha's old servant Gehazi, and three other lepers, were sitting in the shadow of one of the two tall towers flanking the great gate, and bewailing their fate.

"Brothers in affliction," said Gehazi; "how foolish of us to sit here till we die, in the way of the soldiers. If we enter the city and beg, what can we hope to get in such a famine? If we were let work we might hope for something, but who will let a leper touch his tools. So then,



if we stay here we die—if we go to our quarter, we die as well; let us act the brave man's part. Just outside the wall, are Syrians dead, killed in the sortie we made three days since. From them we will get the arms. In the dark, we will fall upon the enemy's outposts, and fight to be killed. I'm a-weary of this life, and I pray too often for death not to embrace it now."

"Good, good," said the rest.

At twilight, therefore, after having informed their countrymen on the walls of their intention so that they should not be shot at for deserters they were let out of the gate. They took each a sword from the corpses outside, crept stealthily on the hostile lines. They saw the fires alight, but the sentinels were no where to be seen. The four went on. All looked deserted. They moved forward less cautiously, not a challenge did they hear, not a man did they see. They had entered the camp. Arms, armour cloths and tents were without owners. Not a soul was to be seen.

For a visitation had come upon the host. They had heard in the wind a sound as of a great army dashing upon them with beating of hoofs and whirring of chariot wheels. They saw nothing, but that made them the more awfully astonished. They were ready to die for fear and, on some showing the lead, they leaped upon horses and camels and pack-mules, flinging aside everything that could impede their flight, the entire force rode and ran from the encampment.

"It's the allies of Israel!" cried they, "the Hittites and Egyptians are up in arms to make us raise the seige. Away all, for life!"

The lepers penetrated to the farthestmost tent of the abandoned camp and made sure it was theirs. They entered the general's tent and ate and drank to their hearts content, then they took away and buried the gold and silver vessels.

"But," said Gehazi, "let us not be so avaricious. I was punished for that sin. This is a day of too good tidings for us to hold our peace. Let us not wait till morning either, but hurry back and have our countrymen make sure of the immense prize.

"For the sake of the women and children, let us haste," said another.

The four lepers ran back to the city. The gatekeepers would not believe them. They gained audience of the King.

"If your story be true," said he, "it must be only a stratagem of the Syrians. They know how badly we are off for food, and they want to entice us out from behind our defences to defeat us in their camp."

But the stake was so great, that any risk whatever was as nothing. The over prudent monarch, nevertheless, would only consent that some trusty men should take a couple of chariots with the best horses among the poor famished animals left in the royal stables. These went out to scout, and reported at daybreak that they had reached the fugitives far beyond the camp, and that the whole line of their flight was strewn with camp equipage and weapons that had been cast away. Therefore the gates were thrown open at their widest and out rushed the hungry people. All the gatherings of the captured graineries and farmhouses were in the camp, so that, in truth, wheat, corn, and other grains were over abundant.

The lord who had so laughed at the now-evident truth being possible to the Almighty, was appointed to oversee those returning from the camp, and prevent the people retaining the treasures which were to go to the crown. He, indeed, as Elisha had said, saw the plenty, for the long train extended thirty abreast from the camp to the gates, every man's back laden, every mouth full, and all arms clasping something. But he did not partake of the wind-

fall, for the throng crowded through the gates so eagerly to bear nourishment to the dear ones nearly perishing at home, that he was crushed under foot and trodden to death.

Elisha, on departing to Damascus, told the Shunamite woman, of whom he had recuscitated the son, to travel with her family out of the country as there was to be a famine of seven years' duration to scourge the land, which was black with iniquity. She obeyed believingly and dwelt all that time in the kingdom of the Philistines.

Meanwhile Benhadad had fallen ill, and he, on learning that the prophet who had foretold his plans of war among so many other verified prophecies, was in his capital, sent his favorite general and companion Hazael to ask him his fate. Hazael took with him forty camels loaded with presents for Elisha.

"Your son King Benhadad has sent me to you, man of heaven to inquire if he must die of his ailment."

"Are you not Hazael?"

"Yes."

"Elijah my foregoer anointed you, did he not?"

"Yes, my master," returned the Syrian, "and still I am not king yet!"

"You will be, for the Lord has decreed it, for the punishment of Israel. Yes, you shall prevail against that sinful nation," said Elisha, with tears in his aged eyes, "you shall fire their strongholds and slay their young men with the sword in the field and their women in the keeps."

"I, I?" repeated Hazael surprised, "is your servant a dog to do such evil? Do not say it, master."

"It is heaven's will. You will be king over Syria. But tell Benhadad that his disease will not be his death. Nor will it, but still—this is but a prevarication, for he is shortly to die."

Hazael started, turned pale and looked at the speaker.

"He dies within four-and-twenty hours," repeated Elisha, "but nevertheless you are to tell him: 'you will not die of your disease.'"

King Benhadad was greatly joyed at the news, but the next day, as he slept, Hazael smothered him with a wet cloth which prevented any suspicions of having murdered him alighting on him, and usurped the throne. And, as Elisha had known, the wars he waged against Israel were cruel beyond description, so that at length, when the Israelites were relieved of his onslaughts, they could only muster ten thousand footmen, fifty horsemen, and but ten war-chariots. In this calamity, the then monarch of Israel came to consult with Elisha, who was on the sickbed on which ere long he was to die. King Joash entered his chamber weeping and described the nation's distress.

"We are fallen so low in the dust," said he, "that all around us they make a mock of us and almost laugh us into believing we are not the Lord's chosen. But I, for one, still hope, deep as our grievances are."

"You are right, my son. Take bow and arrows."

The king called a servant who gave him a quiver and a strung bow. Elisha put his aged hands on the king's much younger ones.

"Open the window towards the east," said he, "and shoot. It shall be the arrow of heaven's deliverance of you from Syria. The news will come before a great while that relentless King Hazael no longer governs Syria. He is dead. Now, strike the floor with the arrows."

The monarch held the bunch of arrows in his hand, and he smote the trampled earthen floor with them three times.

"Will that suffice, father?" asked he, stopping.

"You should have continued till I spoke. As it is you

shall only inflict three mighty blows on the Syrians who else would have been utterly destroyed."

And indeed, Hazael was dead, and Benhadad his son, who succeeded him, was as much less a warrior than he that, in three successful campaigns, King Joash recovered the territory lost from Israel in other days.

Elisha died.

A year after his death, the Moabites made an inroad and had a fight with some villagers, who killed one of their party. They would not leave him above ground as prey to the jackals and other beasts, especially as they had time before them and they, finding a sepulchre near at hand, determined to inter their fallen comrade therein. But to their amazement, if not terror, the corpse they had let down with ropes came to life on touching the bones of some one entombed there, and he called to be pulled up. It was the grave of Elisha the Prophet, working a miracle after his death with his lifeless bones.

So have men, dead in soul, been restored to the holy life of divine love and heavenly bliss, by accidental contact with the imperishable remains of a great man, great by goodness. "The righteous is an everlasting fountain, he shall never be removed. His memory is blessed."



*MORDECAI.*

WHEN the Jewish people, by almost continuous progress to all that ill becomes the godly, had brought their punishment face to face with them, it was indeed an hour so dark and lowering that it seemed impossible that even the most hardened heart should be able to remain impenitent.

The Chaldeans of King Nebuchadnezzar had returned from their rebuke of the Egyptians, who had made a diversion in favor of the Hebrews, and had resumed their two years close siege of the doomed city. They were upon all the other hills around those on which Jerusalem was seated and their engines of war and battering-rams encircled the walls within their lines again. The prophesied time appeared to have come, when the heavens should be bright, true, but of the brightness of superficially shining, valueless because hopeless brass, and the ground beneath their eyes, of iron, a pavement of spear-points and sword-blades, steel caps and visored helmets.

Many hundreds had died during the siege of wounds from stones, arrows and the darts from the machines. Others had been cut down in forming a wall of life to the storming parties attempting to enter at breaches, while their comrades built up an inner one behind them. Tens after tens had been slain on the walls during the long night watches by deadly marksmen who had crept up to the edge of the wide ditch, on whose muddy bloody surface floated corpses. The un-

wearied and unweakened foe had punished the city forces greatly in every one of the sorties they made at unexpected hours, and the javelin heads drank blood and the battle-axes devoured flesh under the starless heavens as under the sunny sky, by moon or in storm. Tall towers had been erected opposite low parts of the wall, to be filled with archers and command the interior, and the besieged had been compelled to construct similar turrets of timber against these, till both series of confronting galleries had risen to a dangerous height, the Chaldeans had suddenly cut theirs down so as to pile up all the broken stages under the other. This heap of shivered wood, dry as hay, from long exposure to wind and heat had been kindled by them so that the flames darting up had caught the scaffolding of the Jews, who were thus compelled to leap down, in armor as they were, or perish in the smoke.

The women and children who mourned unceasingly, were not only dying by broken hearts but by a pestilence from the unburied, which the insufficiently fed had to live amid.

The defenders lessened in number daily; not so great a loss though, in one way, for their munitions were nearly expended; the millstones, useless, for where was there corn to bruise? were already hurled by piecemeal over at the obstinate assailants. Iron was more precious than gold and in many cases, in place of the steel head broken off, lances had their ends hardened by fire into a point. The men who rushed to the threatened spot at the blare of the trumpets were only half clad in incomplete panoplies, the links in the chained hauberks being dented and the plates of the solid pieces being battered and nicked; there was no time for burnishing of steel and polishing of brass, in these days when the enemy gave hardly enough leisure for the allowance of thick water and pit-

tance of bran bread of the dust of the scraped out granaries to be hurriedly devoured.

Starvation was the worst of all, for it subdued all that was yet good in the irreligious men. In the early days of the long, long beleaguerment of the Holy City, the soldiers, with a kiss to their children, a smile to their wives, had hastened without a regret almost to do their duty at the outpost, but now smiles were vanished and the kindest-hearted father hardly dared let his hungry teeth approach so nearly the wasted cheek of his darlings. The awful words of ages gone by had become verified, as God's words always must do. The youth of tenderest heart had an eye that turned evilly on his younger brother, his dry tongue hideously licking his parched lips as he saw the thin blood still slowly throb in the veins that stood out like cords on the forehead faded and famished. And the woman, so gentle and delicate and so far from a thing of earth as to hardly dare to venture the arched sole of her tiny foot on the rude ground, glared with the ravenous eye of a tigress on lambs, on her dear husband, her daughter, her son and on the poor little babe smiling vainly as if it, though in its perfect innocence, was nevertheless affected by the horrors around and about.

The horrors, so real and so clearly presented as to fill men's eyes with giddiness and force their visions to fancy further terrors, which made life hang in doubt all the time. Day and night, sighs and prayers went up, but still perversely to powerless idols or to the sun and stars alone, impotent as the earth they implored from, for,—even while the sufferers endured the judgments of the creator of all—if they would blindly see only the feeble creations and not this ineffable glory beyond.

Thence, the remaining soldiers fought mechanically, their bleeding, shoeless feet ran less eagerly to the fray, in which

their scarred and fleshless arms less vigorously plied the hacked and bent, blunt and pointless weapons. Fear, incomprehensible but all the more overpowering by that reason, filled every breast so that scarcely one in five score could sleep an hour away unbrokenly, the least sound making them nervously start. So awfully did this dull dread, more poignant than human harms, weigh upon them that the worn out fighting men begged for the grand assault, daily threatened, and almost rejoiced sickly when they heard a thousand war trumpets sound out the charge along the enviroing lines.

The enemy, who had had the whole country and its products to live upon, and being without families, whose torments so bowed parents with the grief they cannot lessen, were in the highest spirits, and especially enraged that such shadows of men had so long resisted their strength, skill and swarms.

They had levelled the walls by a dozen huge rams into so wide a gap that either to fill it up or defend it was nearly impossible. A large body of the garrison had been placed here, and more would have rallied to it, but that the Chaldeans—at the same time that a long, broad train of stormers rushed into the opening—began attacks on fifty other weak points of the defenders, and gave the inferior power more than enough of employment. The moment that the column had made an entrance, those of their rear who were not pouring in volleys of stones and leaden and iron balls from slings, and showers of darts and arrows, began to make a passage over the battered-down masonry through which the pioneers had been forced to clamber. When they had fashioned a passable road, they gave a loud shout as a signal, when a whole line of three-horse-chariots, holding seven men each, in readiness in the advance of the camp, now flew towards the city, entering by the break

and spreading all over, every street and lane that could be travelled ringing with the flinty clatter of the unironed hoofs.

A canopy of smoke hung over the city, supported by innumerable columns of the same, for fire had completed the destruction which steel had begun.

Amid fierce war-cries in strange tongues, weak responsive shouts, screams and death-groans, the clash of weapons and the hiss of fire, fell Jerusalem to all but utter ruin.

The Jewish King and a considerable body broke down the walls from within, after they had seen their palaces sharing the same fate as the people's houses, for the firebrands were flung into everywhere from the meanest dwelling to the Temple itself, and endeavored to make an escape over the plain, but the remainder of the Chaldeans, in their encampment, cut off their retreat and easily captured them, from most of these being loaded with their choicest and most precious goods.

Among the unfortunate captives taken away from their city laid in ashes and blood, was a young boy and a young girl, cousins, whose relations and parents had died during the siege or in the final assault. He was named Mordecai, she Esther. They had been set apart by a Persian auxiliary of Nebuchadnezzar with other prisoners composing a portion of his share of the spoil, and were brought into his own country.

Mordecai was a child of two of the few who had pursued the right path, who had not scoffed or doubted the words of the true prophets and who had never let images be set up for worship in their own dwellings, or let themselves pay devotions to the many in the streets and in temples. Among the defiled, they had remained pure, and their faith had only been strengthened day by day by the fulfilment of the heaven-given prophecies under their believing



through saddened eyes. Mordecai himself had the ancient words of promise deeply engraven on his youthful mind and in his ears they sounded constantly as if everlastingly breathed by an eternal voice.

"If, while those that are left of you in the land of your enemies, pining away for their iniquity, shall confess it to the Lord of their fathers and their hearts be humbled and they accept the punishment of their wrong-doing. He will remember the covenant, and restore the captives of Israel who shall dwell once again in the midst of a happier Jerusalem whose streets shall be filled with the aged, so old as to be every one staff in hand, and with the merry boys and girls without the shadows of a care."

With religious principles well grounded, Mordecai naturally prospered even in the sad condition of his early days. He pleased his masters so greatly that he was presented with his freedom, and, in two or three years afterwards had amassed no inconsiderable sum of money in a commerce of his own. He applied his newly acquired fortune to purchase liberty for his cousin Esther, whom he had kept watch over and whom he now adopted to be treated as if, their ages apart, she were his daughter.

Esther grew up to be as fair as she was good and wise under the teachings of her relation, whose leisure hours, snatched from a trade that made him a thriving merchant, were happily spent tutoring the beautiful child. So does a charitable act repay itself from the very first commencement of it. The large price Mordecai had paid for his cousin's manumission was so much loss to him as far as money repayment went, but the bright eyes, the joyous face, the gracefulness of her who loved him, for his kindness and accomplishment of duty, next to heaven, far outweighed the thoughts which might have prevailed with a mercenary man.

Now it came to pass in the days of King Ahasuerus, who had only been three years on the throne of the great kingdom of the hundred and thirty countries which extended from India to Ethiopia, that he had a festival. To it were invited and came all the princes and chief nobles, whom he entertained for a hundred days, displaying, to their dazzled eyes, all the pomp of his palace of Shushan. They gazed on the treasures, endless and innumerable, contained in lofty chambers hung with brilliant tapestry of all colors and of finest material, and having tessellated floors of variegated marble, and they drank and ate out of gold and silver dishes and cups.

King Ahasuerus, excited by wine, as a crowning gem of his collection, commanded several of his chamberlains to transmit his orders to Queen Vashti. These were for her to apparel herself in her richest and to wear her most splendid crown, so as to gild refined gold, that is to try to adorn her inconceivable beauty. But she, haughty and not caring to present herself as a mere ornament to the gaze even of princes, ungraciously refused to appear in any guise whatever to the sight-seers.

The monarch was enraged at this, and swore to punish one who had scorned his mandate, not through modesty (which would have added a jewel, more valuable than all the others, to her loveliness), but by an arrogance that no sovereign could brook.

So he broke up the revelry instantly, and called the council together of the seven high princes of the realm, before whom he laid his grievance, asking if anything could be lawfully done against Queen Vashti. The chief counsellor answered that no law would reach her as it was, but that such conduct ought to be punished. For, if the ladies throughout the dominion learnt that the queen was permitted with impunity to indulge in scorn and haughtiness to-

wards not only her consort, but the first dignitaries and people, there would be no such thing kept alive except by the few as loving devotion and submission to husbands.

"If it please the king," therefore, continued the adviser, "to prevent so much threatened contempt and anger which would lead to most serious heartburnings, let him proclaim a royal commandment to be one of the unalterable laws of the Medes and Persians, that never more shall Queen Vashti be let enter the royal presence, and that her place shall be vacant to be filled at the king's pleasure."

The decree was welcome to the sovereign and it was issued accordingly. The queen was banished. But after a time, when his wrath had been appeased, King Ahasuerus, in his loneliness, remembered his exiled wife for only her pleasant acts and not for her evil ones, and he was on the point of trying to restore her, in spite of the law being immutable. His consellers who dreaded the return to favor of one who would surely be avenged on them, united their brains to devise a counterplot.

"Our lord the king," said they, one day appearing before him, "your servants have seen with sorrow a cloud on your once happy face. It must be caused by the void that even the removal of a wicked woman will leave. It is not right that the king of such an immense territory should be alone when he has multitudes of the fair within his reach. Let all the young girls throughout the realm be made to come before the throne, so that your majesty may choose a companion. We have spoken. Have we spoken well?"

"The council has well spoken," returned Ahasuerus gladly; "let the preparations commence immediately."

It was done. For many days all the favorites, fair children, mothers' darlings, in the land were brought to Shushan. For two months and more, they passed before the throne in review, but none of them delighted him to the extent of

his desiring them for a queen. At length the beauties of the capital city began to appear.

Among them was Esther. Mordecai had been compelled to let her go, for it was impossible to evade the decree. He had charged her, however, not to reveal her race, and she who had always obeyed him who was both father and brother to her, did not do otherwise now. He was so anxious about her that he walked every day before the house of one of the king's chamberlains, which had been set apart for the women, so as to have a few words with his cousin.

Esther, different from the other girls, who, (in the desire to please and knowing it had been ordered that nothing should be refused them) were not content till the most gorgeous robes of brightest colors and loads of jewelry shone over them from head to foot, modestly let herself be attired in whatever the chamberlain gave her. And yet, unadorned her beauty was adorned the most, for the King set his choice on her, and to her he threw the handkerchief. So Esther the Jewess, was made queen of King Ahasuerus in the seventh year of his reign, her humble head being crowned by the royal hands themselves. A feast, too, was proclaimed to be called Esther's feast, and provinces and capital united in a manifestation of joy.

Of course, as the queen could not act as the obscure girl had full liberty to do, she could not visit Mordecai. She could not have him come to her, much as she longed for an interview. But he, his ideas quickened by the unbearable thought of not seeing the endeared one any more except by accident, took his plan.

Along the sides of the wide street which led down from the main entrance of the palace, were booths and traders' shops, whose customers were the retainers and the attendants of the royal household. One of these Mordecai bought and made into his place of business, and, to his joy, the

crowd of be-laced servitors were often before his stall, gazing at the silk stuffs, rare shawls and scarfs, jewelled slippers, pipes and other articles of his stock-in-trade which he displayed in the front of his place. His heart leaped as he often heard them praise amid their gossip the Queen Esther so good, so beautiful. Little did any of them suspect that the Hebrew who stood in the doorway idly regarding the sky or the magnificent steps and front of the palace, was really drinking in the words which came from the source of all his happiness.

In this new position of his, he saw her pass every fine day, and, after she had by chance recognized him, her eyes stealthily were flung his way, and he was merry of heart all the day for the smile she gave for him.

So time passed with Mordecai at the King's gate.

One night as he was trying to get to sleep (he lived in his little booth to guard his valuable merchandise,) he heard two men softly walking down the dark avenue from the palace. That was a strange thing as it was, and he, fearing they were discharged servants or some of the evil disposed who lurked about the palace to execute wicked offices, went cautiously to the little door in the rear of his stall and was about to go out, when they suddenly slipped in between his and the neighbourieg house and hardly gave him time to draw back. There they stopped in the shadow within arm's reach of him, but utterly unconscious of that. In a low tone, but audible to him, the two conspirators, for such they were, unfolded a murderous design which they had upon the life of Ahasuerus. They were two of the royal chamberlains and these were often near enough to the King to carry out their object.

Mordecai hardly awaited the dawn but at the first breaking hastened to bear a scroll in Hebrew to the palace to be given as early as possible to Queen Esther. It was the



dialogue which he had heard during the night, and which he had sat up to write. She communicated the information to her husband, and he set inquiries afoot. The plotters were found guilty and hanged. Ahasuerus was not slow to show his gratitude to Esther for having saved his life.

The favorite of King Ahasuerus among his courtiers was one Haman, whom he advanced grade by grade till he was placed even above the princes of the blood. Haman never traveled about the city without being slavishly revered as if he were the sovereign himself. Some of his servants noticed that, whenever their train went down the street from the palace amid the general cheering and waving of turbans and shawls and low bows, one shopkeeper either pretended to be busily examining his wares at the moment of Haman's passing, or boldly stood in his doorway, with his form upright. Some of them spoke to him and asked him his reason, to which he replied that Haman was a man unworthy of his station and of the respect due to its proper tenant and that he, besides, had dreadfully oppressed his (Mordecai's) poor fellow countrymen in Adalia by imposition of heavy taxes which gave them no chance of fair trade against the Persians. To such an unjust, rapacious vulture, because he was in the eagle's nest and plumed like a peacock, he would never bend the neck or the knee.

When Haman was told of this, he felt all his evil nature stirred up against the man who had dared to speak out honestly against him, but so proud was he that he deemed it beneath him to avenge the indignity on one man alone though that one man was the only offender. His black heart was not content with less than a massacre of all the Jews, of which people he had learned Mordecai was, throughout the entire realm.

"My lord," said he as soon as he procured audience of the king, which was an easy matter for him to do, "my

lord, there is a certain race dispersed in your vast dominions who are a vein of ruin to them, seeing they do not keep the royal laws or any but their own peculiar ones. Now that we can destroy them, we had better lose no time and do it, for a month or a year later, they may be up in arms against us."

Ahasuerus consented to the plan, relying wholly on the evil adviser, and ten thousand silver pieces were paid out for the hire of the assassins whom Haman sent into every division of the country, and, ere long, when they had secured all the weapons and filled the forts, a proclamation was made for all to be ready for the slaughter by a certain day. While the king feasted with his favorite, the people, Jews and others, were in great emotion. The former were almost thunder stricken at an edict so barbarous against them, whose old men and young were as innocent of wrongful thought against the nation as the women and children who were also sentenced to death. The others were grieved in the most part, too, for they were no wise eager to harm people who had been the best of neighbors to them. In the cities, like Shushan the capital, where there was a large proportion of the doomed ones, the whole population was greatly perplexed.

Like others Mordecai had closed his shop, torn off his gayer dress, donned sackcloth and powdered his bare head with ashes, and bewailed the unrighteous judgment even before the palace entrance. There he was seen by Queen Esther, and she sent out rich clothing to him and prayed him to remove his mourning habits for that. But he would not do it.

Esther, who never in the least paid attention to the affairs of the realm, had, singularly enough, remained in the fullest ignorance of the decree against her countrymen. She, unable to account for a grief so intense in her cousin, sent out one

of her attendants to question the mourner. He would only acquaint her, then he said, in a private interview with her. This she gave readily, and he in a cloak of proper colors being accepted by him (for mourning of any kind was not allowed in the precincts of the palace unless by special order), was ushered into her presence.

They dared not kiss nor speak in a high tone for fear that eyes and ears might be on them.

Mordecai told her all, showed her a copy of the decree, and begged her for the sake of God, who had perhaps elevated her for this very hour and for the sake of the people so mercilessly and unreasonably sentenced, to go to King Ahasuerus and beg a reversion of the order or a pardon.

"But, Mordecai," said she, her eyes streaming with tears at the thought of the awful doom suspended over her kindred, "everybody knows that whoever, man or woman, high or low, ventures into the inner court without being summoned by the king, breaks the law and must die. The king alone can save them by letting them touch his golden sceptre of state.

"Ah but, Esther," said Mordecai, not understanding her, "beware if you let your head be uplifted when all of your kin are lowered to the dust. On you and yours will fall the blood whose spilling you might have prevented. Try, try all means to prevent such a crime. Heaven only knows if you have not been exalted for this same purpose."

"Mordecai," said Esther sorrowfully, "I never thought that my own cousin, he who has been often enough with me to know me a little, would so misjudge me. Do you fancy I would hold my one life above the many more precious ones. Go and tell all our countrymen in the city to fast for three days, and I and all my maids will do the same. Then will I go to the king, whom I have not seen for a

month, and break the law. If I live you live. If I perish, all die."

On the third day, Esther had herself attired in her queen's robes and boldly entered the inner court of the palace, at the end opposed to the entrance of which sat the king on his throne. He started on seeing her, and immediately held out to her his golden sceptre. She hastened to touch its tip.

"What do you wish, my fair Queen? what is there that I will not give you even to half my kingdom."

"I only desire, my good lord," answered Esther, "that your majesty and Haman may come to the banquet I give to-morrow night."

"That is no request, Esther. Most assuredly we would have gone, without your coming here to me. I do not consider that your desire. Remember, if there is any favor you conceive it is already granted, even to half my kingdom. I have said it."

When Haman heard from the king that Queen Esther, had personally invited him to a feast, he could not contain himself for joy. When he reached his mansion he called his wife, children and friends around him in an entertainment. During it he enlarged upon his already lofty and magnificent position, and vaunted of his having been upreared over all the princes in the realm.

"And to-morrow night, I go to feast with the king and queen alone, by the latter's express invitation. I have only one care in the world. There is that wretch Mordecai by the palace gates yet, and he let me pass by without moving a muscle unless it was to show his scorn of me. I cannot bear it."

"Nonsense," said one of his friends, "the time is near at hand when not one of the cursed breed will be left to look contemptuously on any one."

"True, and yet my patience is severely tried by the sight of this insolent fellow."

"Then," said his wife, "why not have a very high gallows set up at the end of our large garden. Have it high enough to tower over the trees. You can see it from these windows and all the city will have it before their eyes. Not one will dare to do anything against you under that terror."

"Well said, dear wife," said Haman joyfully, "I can go to the banquet with a light heart now."

On that night, while Esther was praying (like Mordecai) that all would be well, and while Haman was superintending the erection of a gibbet, King Ahasuerus was restless and in vain sought sleep. As a last resort, he had one of the scribes bring from the hall of records the chronicles of the royal deeds, and try to read him to slumber. It happened that the first chapter turned up was the beginning of the account of the conspiracy which had been defeated by Mordecai's having overheard the plotters.

"Yes," said Ahasuerus, remembering, "Queen Esther informed me. She had been told of it by—"

"Mordecai a Jew, my lord, who had surprised the treasonable conversation and who, instead of trying to get money from them, as he might have done, communicated the valuable secret to her majesty and thus saved my lord's treasured life."

"By the bye, what reward did this Jew receive?" asked the king.

"Nothing, my lord, no reward at all," returned the scribe, "unless her majesty the queen gave him one."

"Ah, this is how princes' carelessness makes them be accused of ingratitude and weakens devotion to the state. Remind me in the morning of this matter. You need read no more, but go. I shall sleep now, I think."



The first to enter the king's presence at his levee was the premier, Haman. He found Ahasuerus deeply pondering over something.

"Haman, you are a sound adviser," said the monarch, looking up with a perplexed air, "what ought to be done to the man to whom the king owes much and wishes to honor?"

The minister considered a moment. Who could the king wish to honor but himself, Haman? To whom did he owe much except him? So he believed this was merely an ingenious mode of making him state his own price. His vanity tempted him on to ask the most.

"Your majesty can imagine the fitting recompense better than I," answered he, "but if my opinion is really requested, I should say, this should be done. Let the person to be favored be dressed in the robes of royalty themselves, be set upon the king's own horse, and be escorted through the streets, with heralds going before him to proclaim: 'This is the man to whom King Ahasuerus delights to show honor and his gratitude!'"

"Excellent!" said the monarch, clapping his hands, "it shall be done forthwith precisely as you say. Go you and take my coronation robes, and all except the crown and sceptre, have my favorite horse led from the stables richly caparisoned, collect a large body of my own body-guard for escort, with heralds. With them all go to the house of—"

Haman smiled to himself and thought; "To the house of Haman," but Ahasuerus, not in the least suspecting his favorite's idea, added:

"Of one Mordecai, a Jew, who has a little house on the avenue before the palace. He can be easily found."

"Too easily found," muttered the mortified minister, about to turn away. "Ah, the Jew who was in the con-

spiracy against your majesty's life and who betrayed his companions to save himself. I believe, was he not? I do not remember exactly."

"You do not, that is true," said the sovereign a little sharply. "No such a thing. I was reading last night of all. The traitors confessed. He had nothing at all to do with it, except what every good subject and honest man might have properly. I have been grossly thankless to him. Haste to oversee my gratitude to him."

Thus was Haman the proud and distinguished, compelled undesignedly to do the utmost honor to the lowly Mordecai whom he so deeply hated. With a heart almost broke with malice, Haman went to his house that afternoon, furious at having had to lead the procession of glorification to his enemy. In vain did his wife and friends try to console him for some hours. At length, his retinue formed their troop at his door ready to conduct him to the palace to Queen Esther's banquet. His wife assured him that all would be well now, as he had only to ask for a tenant for his gallows now finished.

Haman was received the same as ever by the King and Queen, and his spirits revived under the influence of their familiarity with him and of the wine. At the first opportunity he began to speak of a favor he desired of the King.

"One moment," said the latter quickly, "if you please, the lady first. Esther," continued he, turning to his queen, "you have a favour to ask and receive of me, now that I am reminded of it. What is yours?"

"My Lord, if I am beloved of you, grant me as you may what I ask most earnestly. Let my life be given me at my request, with the lives of my people dear to me."

Ahasuerus started in surprise, and Haman was astonished as well, for neither of them knew the nationality of the queen.

"If we had all been sold only to be bond men and women," resumed Esther, "I would have said nothing, but ten thousand pieces of silver blood money has been paid out for all of us to be murdered pitilessly."

"You! your people!" exclaimed Ahasuerus. "Who is he who has dared to plot evil against my dearly loved consort and her kin? where is he?"

"My lord, he is at this board. It is Haman."

"Haman! then you are a Jewess!" cried the king starting up.

"A Jewess, my lord, which is the only secret I have ever kept from your majesty, love for whom it has not weakened. My people are the poor, oppressed Jews, as guiltless as wronged."

Haman confused, kept his seat and shudderingly lowered his head. All was over with him, indeed. He was hanged on that very same tree he had had erected for his enemy, and that enemy was given his house, his wealth and his station.

The queen, and Mordecai the new minister, sought to have the decree against the Jews reversed. But that could not be done, for the laws of the realm were unalterable by even the king.

"But," said Ahasuerus, "this can be done. I will publish a new proclamation which shall give the Jews full permission to defend themselves, their families and their houses, and not to be answerable for any harm they may in so doing inflict on my subjects."

This manifesto was quickly copied out, and sent all over the land by messengers on horse, mule and camel. Then the Jews held festivals everywhere, calling the time Purim. In Shushan, the sentenced people gave a great banquet, at which presided Mordecai, clad as became his dignity in purple and white robes, and bearing a crown of gold.

Many people became followers of the true faith for fear of the Jews.

When the day of massacre came, the lieutenants and provincial officers of the realm, with the royal troops under their command, were found to be all on the side of the Jews, for they obeyed Mordecai. Hence in a few places only was there any fighting; and that by the mercenaries of Haman and by such people as had quarrels with the strangers. But the latter were victors everywhere. No one ventured afterward to show his envy and hatred of the lately released people henceforth the foremost, and they prospered as they merited for faithfulness, order, and industry.

Mordecai, till the day of his lamented death, was the second in the kingdom, beloved by all the people, revered by his race, and preserving a happy peace to them all.

*DANIEL.*

AMONG the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon brought away with him after his defeat of the King of Judah, were many youths, who were given to an officer of his household, who was to rear them up in the knowledge of the Chaldean tongue and of such other things as would make them agreeable attendants for the ruler. These were so especially cared for that meats and drinks from the royal table were sent to the house of this officer.

At the first meal given them, to which the prisoners, allured by the dainties and the viands, gave themselves ravenously, all the more from their having expected a harsher fate and far coarser fare, four of them asked a private hearing of the officer, and by one of them, Daniel, put this request to him :

"Sir officer, we earnestly desire that we may not have to eat of these dishes—very dainty, no doubt, but not prepared nor of the food which our religion permits us to taste. Be so kind, therefore, as to let us have something simple, any eatable plants plucked from the ground will amply suffice."

The officer had already conceived a deep liking for Daniel, and he was willing to grant him any reasonable favor.

"But, Belteshazzar (as Daniel's new name was,)" said he considering, "I dare not permit any such diet. The King sends, such and such dishes to keep you in better health. If he sees you and your three friends thinner and paler than the rest, he will inquire, and whether he finds out or not how



it happened, he will be enraged at me, and I will be fortunate if my head is left on my shoulders. No, I am sorry, but the royal orders must be obeyed."

Persevering, however, Daniel repeated his entreaties and said :

" But give us, your servants, some days' trial on the plain fare, and drink only water."

For ten days, he let the four eat apart from the others, and, to his surprise, their faces were rosier and their figures fatter than any of the others who, quite otherwise from eating simple salads and drinking pure water, had been reveling on choice flesh, sweetmeats and luscious wines. So, ever afterwards, during the three years that the captives were brought up under his charge, nothing was set before Daniel and his three friends but what they alone desired.

The end of the time given up for their education passed, and the officer brought them all before the king. He questioned them one after another, set them in arguments with one another, had learned men examine them as well as himself, and found none equalled, in knowledge general or special, Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The king pronounced them severally to be ten times superior in all manner of science to any sage he had in his realm. Great favors were poured upon them consequently, and if anything could have had the power to do so, the captives might have forgotten in their easy lives, the homes in Judah from which they had been snatched.

One night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, which greatly oppressed him. He could not sleep after it; before the dawn he sent off messengers to wake up and conduct to him the principal diviners and astrologers. They were speedily bowing before him.

"Men of years of study," said he, "I have dreamed, and I am greatly vexed by the vision."

They bowed again, and answered :

"Long live your majesty ! let your servants know what the vision was, and its meaning shall be told to you."

But the king, frown as he might and seek to peer into vacancy, was forced to answer :

"But the picture on my mind, vivid as it was, has vanished. But let me know the signification of it, and what gift is there that I shall withhold from you ? Speak, and I will honor you."

But the whole of them bowed, lower than before.

"If we are told the dream, the answer will be forthcoming, my lord."

"I have said : The thing has passed from me. But, you who only pretend to be wise, hark ye, if you do not find out what my dream was and what it portends, by the sword of my father, I'll have your deceiving carcasses cut to pieces and your houses levelled with the dust !"

"But, great lord, be not angry—tell, tell us the dream—"

But the king sat up in his couch, and his voice shook with passion :

"I know you of old, you wish to gain time. I am a king whose word is never repeated. The dream and its interpretation !"

"No king that ever ruled ever asked such questions of any magician," returned the boldest Chaldean. "No man on earth can do it, my lord. Only the gods, who are all spirit and not fallible flesh."

But Nebuchadnezzar would not listen to any among them, and had them driven from his presence. His fury did not relax there, but he issued his mandate that all the learned men should be put to death. The ones who had

lately confronted him had prudently concealed themselves and the royal guards were disappointed in searching every one of their houses. At last, they entered Daniel's residence and barely gave him an instant to prepare for death.

"But, good Captain Anoch," said Daniel to the leader of the guard, "why have you broken in here—when you know the doors are always open to you and all in the king's liveries? And why do you purpose my death?"

"By order of the king!"

"By order of the king? What have I done to offend his majesty?"

The captain read the decree.

"Ah! but captain, do not be too hasty. Lead me to the palace and, I pray you, sheath your weapons before any blood is spilt."

No sooner was he before Nebuchadnezzar than he assured him that in a little time, he should acquaint him with his dream and also with its portension. The delay was granted, and while the monarch fretted, Daniel's friends lifted up their prayers in unison with his that God would befriend them alone among the stranger and prevent the shedding of innocent blood. Before the grace besought had expired Daniel had the desired secret transmitted to him. Deep and heartfelt were his thanks. On the moment he hurried to the palace.

"Belteshazzar," said the sovereign, "you look confident it is true. Are you able to make known to me what is entombed beyond my own view even in my mind?"

"My Lord and master," replied Daniel unfaltering in speech: "To be sure, not one of the soothsayers can hope to unveil such a secret. But there is a God in heaven who is All-wise as He is all in everything. He maketh known, by me, to King Nebuchadnezzar, that this is what you saw while your august eyes were closed in slumber."

And to the amazement of the King, Daniel did indeed describe to him that which only he and the God who had sent it, had seen under the shroud of sleep. The King acknowledged in a surprised tone, as he bowed himself to the ground to worship Daniel, that the power which knows secrets, alone could reveal this one to him. He did not stop there but elevated the Hebrew to a high position, bestowed many gifts upon him, ordered an offering of incense to be made to him, and appointed him viceroy of the whole province of Babylon and chief over the wise men. Daniel, besides, obtained leave of the King to place Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in stations next under him.

It was not long after this, that Nebuchadnezzar had the idea come to him of setting a new idol up for his people to worship.

So, on the appointed day—by which time all the distinguished men called from different parts of the kingdom, had arrived, the long and pompous procession proceeded towards the Plain of Dura. There, on a high base, was erected the image, covered now with a large cloth. The princes of the royal house, the nobility, the officers, the judges and other eminent officials were gathered around the King, behind them were the soldiers in great number, who kept back the immense concourse of people. At the signal from the King, who was upraised to a level with the figure on a broad platform of wood which was draped with scarlet linen, the priests, numbering upwards of three hundred, formed a half-circle before the pedestal. As they swung their censers, in which burnt substances which sent up in volumes, spicy and fragrant smoke, two of the highest removed the cover and exposed to the eyes of the multitude a brilliant statue of pure gold, invaluable, no matter what might have been the material, from its exquisite

moulding, but beyond estimation when composed solid of the precious metal.

Above the shouts of the populace, over whose heads waved swords, hats, bright cloths, and open hands, arose the tantaras of trumpets of brass and silver, and of horns, the clinking of cymbals, the beating of drums and tamborines, the thundering of stringed instruments, all to greet the new object of veneration. The priests proceeded with the dedication, chanting hymns of praise to the sound of flutes, surrounding the idol in three rows of fifty deep, and, with the assistance of butchers especially chosen, slew a whole herd of cattle and whole flocks of sheep, which, on the altars were soon emitting the odor of burning flesh.

And while the Babylonians were gazing on the golden effigy, enfolded now and anon by the circling vapor, red and light blue, on the white-robed priests, on their monarch, on their princes only less gorgeously appareled than he, on the army of warriors, with unstained weapons and in panoply as bright as the very sun, heralds penetrated their masses and, each to his audience after a blast of trumpets to secure hearing, proclaimed :

“Be it known to ye of all nations, races and tongues, that Nebuchadnezzar the unequalled king, commands : That, no matter when you hear the signal sounds for worship, then you shall bow down and worship the image of gold which the great ruler has erected. Whoever shall not so do, will be burnt alive. So perish all enemies of our peerless lord the king !”

Therefore, whenever the music came upon the ear from piping harp, flute, horn, or any of the warning instruments of the priests (which they used to designate the times of prayer, as bells, unknown then, were used afterwards), all who heard it obeyed the rule. The soldier dismounted from his horse, the market-men laid aside their money, the house-



wives ceased in what they were doing, the pitcher of water and crust of bread was lowered from the mouth, and everywhere knees bent and prayers went up in honor of the cast of gold.

Some time before this, when Nebuchadnezzar was still under the influence of the surprise arising from Daniel's divination of his forgotten dream, he had lost faith in his idols in favor of the Hebrew's God, and he had so far shown symptoms of conversion that he had let Daniel try to give a proof of the worthlessness of the false priests.

In a lofty and spacious hall of a huge temple was the monstrous statue of Bell, the chief god. The people had the custom of bringing tempting dishes of uncooked and cooked meats and fruits and setting them on a long table before the idol, the belief being that the ponderous image devoured them himself. Now Daniel declared that was impossible, too plainly impossible, but the king answered : Here was the large room closed every night, no one could enter because of the priests who lived in the temple and who guarded the chamber of worship from profanation, and yet the eatables and drinks were vanished in the morning. The Hebrew said: Then, the priests must be guilty of making away with the offerings, and, as Nebuchadnezzar doubted and assured him they were holy men, he only asked to be let try them.

On a given day, the king had all the entrances walled up, and when all were out of the chamber of Bel, he had seals put on the main doors, giving orders that death should be the fate of whoever should touch the wax. A large supply of roast meats, sweetmeats and wine had been left within. Three days after, the seals, discovered intact, were removed in presence of the sovereign. They entered.

The hall was untenanted save at the farther end where towered the vast proportions of the statue. The table,

nevertheless, upheld empty dishes alone ; not a drop of wine remained in one golden cup, not a shred of flesh or crumb of cake was left in the silver dishes. The priests smiled in triumph, the king looked convinced, and the witnesses of what seemed their god's display of power, scarcely refrained from a shout. Daniel, however, was in no way shaken in opinion. He whispered to the king, who "for the last time," he said, agreed to his proposition.

Unknown to any except the monarch, the Jew and the servants, sworn to secrecy, who did the work, the temple floor was strewn an inch thick with fine ashes. The entrances were examined, but the bricks filling them up were found undisturbed. The hall was then left to the idol and the growing darkness, the table having been set out more bountifully than ever before. At early dawn, when hardly it was light enough to see, again came Nebuchadnezzar, with his adviser, to watch the taking off of the re-affixed seals. Only the sovereign and Daniel entered. The former glanced first at the table ; by the grey glimmer, the dishes were seen to be in disorder and evidently drained and clean of contents.

The king turned to Daniel to see him confess his error, but the latter, who had carefully surveyed the floor, lifted his eyes presently with the joy of one confirmed in his supposition.

"Look, look, my lord !" cried he.

By the increasing light, reddened by the first streakings of the rising sun, they saw that on the fine powder, in places near the table where they had not themselves trod, were the marks of footsteps. And more, the prints were those of the peculiar-shaped sandals restricted to the priesthood. It was clear, accustomed to enter in the night so had they come that night, but, afraid to carry lights as on other occasions, for fear of the royal guards standing sentry be-

neath the hall windows, they had not perceived that they were impressing their infamy at every stride to deception that they took.

By following the line of the marks, the door, concealed in the thick wall, was also found, and the king was compelled to confess that Daniel was wholly in the right.

He would have had them die on the instant, who had so deceived him and was eager to exhibit all the cheat to the people without, but Daniel, knowing the power which the designing priests must have possessed over the ignorant masses, counselled otherwise. He even pleaded for the culprits to be pardoned and punished only by being placed out side the royal favor. But Nebuchadnezzar, though yielding to much of the wisdom of Daniel's advice, determined still on depriving the foremost of the sacred officials of their places and banishing them to remote portions of his kingdom. He had the huge statue upset and chopped to pieces, and the jewels which it was studded with, and the offerings stored up in the treasury, transferred to his own ; an act of scarcely more than just reprisal, forasmuch as the greater weight of gold and silver and the greater quantity of gems had been his own presents.

So it was done, and Daniel was all the more esteemed by those to whom the secret of Bel's Temple was imparted.

The same banished priests had, by underhand means, recovered favor, returned, and were now officiating in the worship of the new idol. Though, reinstated, they had not forgotten their thirst of revenge on Daniel. They knew how firmly he was attached to his own faith, and on that ground alone—for he was above suspicion as to honesty and honor—could they hope to ruin him. But he was too careful to be entrapped by them, and as they never could see him at the hours of prayer, for he always retired to his private rooms then, they could bring no accusation

against him. Unable to injure him directly, they thought to pierce him through his friends. Knowing his affection for his immediate subordinates, Shadrach and his two fellows, they spied them in all their acts. They discovered more than they had desired, even.

One morning, they chose three of themselves to represent them and appeared before the king.

"My lord," said they, "has made a decree that all throughout his boundless and excellently-governed realm, shall worship his splendid golden image, under penalty of a death by fire. Now, there are three of the captives taken by our warlike master in his success over Jerusalem, who have in no wise regarded his solemn statutes. They do not offer to your gods nor bend the knee to your image."

The monarch was in fury at the contempt, and as soon as he had learnt that the accused were Daniel's three friends, he gave his signet ring to the nearest officer and had the Hebrews dragged before him. They were not in the least daunted, though they saw in their complainants, men, who they were well aware were deadly enemies of their superior.

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you neither serve our gods nor worship the golden one I have lately had set up?"

They bowed a "yes."

The king controlled his passion, for he could not help remembering how faithfully these captives had accomplished the duties of their posts, nor help feeling more grateful to them than to their base accusers.

"It is true? So be it. I pardon."

The priests looked blank and were on the point of breaking forth in anger and disappointment, but that Nebuchadnezzar waved them into silence.

"Shadrach, and you with him, hear me. I am not harsh to true servants, as you have been. If, when you hear the

signals, you do worship, like ourselves, the image I have made, all will be well."

They shook their heads.

"*But*," cried he sternly, "if you refuse, that same hour you shall be flung into the fiercest flames of the hottest fire, and we shall see what God can deliver you."

With one voice the three responded :

"We cannot do that, oh, king!"

And Shadrach went on alone :

"My lord, we trust in our God, who can deliver us from your mighty power, your massive prisons, from your armed men, from your terrible pyres. We know His power. There is none in idols : they are but so much metal, wood or stone, which cannot see, hear, speak, even move without the hand of man. Our God is the true, the ever-living Lord, before whose wrath alone we tremble—His indignation we alone cannot abide. We cannot and would not, if we could, debase His image vivified by His breath too holy for us, in obeisance to man's creations. We have spoken, have we not, brothers?" concluded he, turning to his friends.

They said firmly : "yes, his words, king, are our own."

It was in vain that Daniel, at the risk of incurring the royal disgrace himself, interfered to save his endeared fellows ; Nebuchadnezzar was unyielding. The next day, on the level tract in front of the image they were declared to have insulted, a roomy furnace was erected in which the three Jews were to suffer. A countless assemblage gathered and watched, from early morning, the preparations : the piling up of the resinous fir wood not only within the kiln, but outside and over its walls as well. As soon as the king had taken his place, and lifted his hand, the high priest gave the signal, and in thirty spots, the torch was applied. The flames spread, met with its fighting tongues,



formed one whole sheet of red and yellow glare and, thus enveloping the heap of wood in one golden cloak, mounted in a pyramid. So far did it cast around its heat that the foremost lines of the crowd were in haste to recoil and placed more respectful distance between them and the blaze.

The high priest gave a second signal, and all stopped. their breaths for a moment as were lead forward the three doomed men, bound hand and foot.

Daniel was closeted in his house, praying with all his heart and soul, and with tears in his upturned eyes and sobs in his eloquent throat, to the only Saviour of his dear friends.

If the lookers-on were seized with horror at the sight of the condemned and shivered at the thought of a death so agonizing, the three themselves showed no feeling of terror. They glanced at the multitude, at the king—but not to yield to him at the furnace—but not in dismay or with shrinking, and up at the heavens, where they had placed their trust: where trust, when placed, is ever answered!

Nebuchadnezzar—brave enough himself—might have softened at so much exalted courage, but the high priests had already spoken hastily and motioned the executioners to move on. To each condemned were two men, for they were too tightly bound to walk unsupported. They were dragged, then, towards the fire and as near as they could stand in the scorching circle, they waited, until the wind blew from them and, sweeping forward the heat and burning brands, left them a bearable tract to traverse. They hurried the captives towards the furnace, did reach the open mouth, but—at the very moment at which they pushed the three forward and turned to flee themselves the current of air changed, turned back, whirled round and round and, smothering their one short scream of excruciating torment with its hiss and roar, left them dead on the

baked earth, their clothes scorched off them, their hair frying under their melted metal caps, and their lifeless bodies caking in a coal black crisp.

The spectators stared aghast.

Meanwhile bound as they were, beyond possibility of motion, the three Jews had fallen headlong into the very radiant core of the incandescent enclosure of fire, where they disappeared from sight, being below the level of the spectators' dazzled eyes.

Nebuchadnezzar, however, was on a raised throne, and his view, therefore, dominated over the interior fire of whirling sparks and leaping lances of incandescent and more strongly devouring flames. He saw, standing up, for he had sprung from his throne-chair in his amazement, the cords unloosen from the wrists and ancles of the three and perish in ashes before they fell to the radiant bottom of the consuming pit. But, he could not believe his sight—the three men—there, in the very heart, of the combatting lances of the igneous element—stood up erect and free, and, stranger yet, they were not alone, but a winged form was also there, a man made of flame, as it were. Not of the gross, impetuous, coruscating, flame of earth, but a bright spirit, calm as pure, but resplendent far beyond the sun or stars: a heavenly essence.

The king stared.

"Sirs! exclaimed he, "were there not three men put into the fire?"

"Yes, my lord."

"But I see four there—they walk about unscathed—and one of them—one is liker a god than a man."

The breeze had fanned the piles outside the furnace wall so furiously that a layer of glowing cinders alone remained in place of the wall forty to fifty feet high, and it had also swept away from the front of the furnace (towards which



The lions' claws drew back within their velvety sheaths; their jaws closed with a snap of the tusks, over which the bloody lips curtained themselves, and they laid down.—Page 280.





faced the throne, situated purposely to windward), nearly all the ashes. Nebuchadnezzar, descending the steps of the platform quickly, and followed by a number of the attendants, walked briskly towards the kiln, which shone yet.

"Meshach, Shadrach, Abednego! come forth!" cried he seeking to peer into the network of lustrous rays.

The people round about were astonished, for they could not—having been unable to see anything themselves—they could not help believing that their sovereign had gone mad. But whatever their surprise then, imagine how they were deep in consternation and how thunder-stricken when—out of the inmost part of the dreadful brazier, at whose outermost circles they had seen six men drop dead and be destroyed to ashes, stepped the three intended victims, the cords burnt off from them, it is true, but not a hair of their bodies warped even by the heat, and a smile on their faces. The thousands looked with all their eyes on the saved, and the soldiers had hard work to keep the excited, stormy mass from rushing to inspect still closer those men, on whom the usually irresistible power had had no conquest, even upon their perishable clothes, which, like themselves, were totally free from the smell of scorching.

The priests confounded, shrunk away, their lamps extinguished and their heads hanging; the populace dispersed in wonder to spread their accounts of the miracle, while the king, greeting the delivered ones heartily, praised their Preserver, and, on the spot, in the hearing of their accusers and defamers, promoted them to higher offices.

What he had witnessed, besides, had such an impression on his mind that he published a decree to all nations that he would be his enemy and deserving of shameful death who should dare to speak ill of the only God worthy of the title, the one that had saved the three Hebrews.

The days now passed pleasantly for Daniel and his friends,



their duties had become light and agreeable ones. With the exception of once, when Daniel was compelled, in truth, to tell the King what gave him pain. It was on this occasion :

One afternoon, it being warm Nebuchadnezzar reclined on a divan near a window. The guards were in an outer chamber, talking in a low voice, not to disturb him, when they heard him call. Supposing some enemy had stolen in and was assassinating their master, they burst through the hangings which formed the door, sword in hand. They found the King sitting up on his couch, his hair bristling with terror, his eyes out of his head and glaring, and his whole frame trembling like a shorn lamb in a chilly shower. They looked around, but he was alone. As soon as he could speak, he hastened to send for the astrologers of the capital, but, though this time he had remembered his visions, for that was what frightened him, they were not capable of unfolding its enigma.

Daniel, as master of the magicians, had also been demanded, and it was while the other sages were at the height of their doubts that he arrived.

"Hail, Belteshazzar," said the king, smiling with pleasure through his trouble, "in you is the more than mortal mind. No secret is secret to you. Tell me the meaning of my dream, which is thus : None of the learned of my whole capital, which encloses all that are wise of my realm, are capable to divine it, but you can do it."

Daniel listened. He withdrew into a corner, and covered his face. Throughout the whole large hall, no one made a sound, other than his suppressed breathing. The king himself, with anxious countenance, waited in silence if not without impatience. They saw Daniel's body shake with strong emotion in the earnestness of his supplications.

"Nay, Belteshazzar," said the king, "never mind, if it

costs so much. Do not let yourself be so agitated for either the dream or its interpretation."

But Daniel, showing his face, calm, but only placid as is a sea after having been tumultuously ruffled by a storm, answered quietly :

"Thanks, my lord, but the Father of the captives has been still again condescending to me. You say you saw a tree in the centre of the known earth, which grew and grew in beauty as in strength until it had lifted its head aloft above this footstool of the Most High and shadowed it far and wide ; while its plentiful leaves, with their topmost ones seemed to be putting themselves forth amid the very clouds ; and while it bore fruit which was nourishment to man, bird and beast. This tree, my lord the king, is you yourself, Nebuchadnezzar, who have grown, in your dominion, from one to the other confine of the earth."

Nebuchadnezzar, with a countenance so relieved as to be nearly joyful, smiled proudly at this picture of his grandeur.

But Daniel solemnly stretched out his hand to check too premature self-congratulation.

"But," continued he in a tone deeper and more feeling, "as the great king saw an angel sail slowly down from heaven, and, when alighted, say : 'Hew down this mighty one of the forest, and destroy it, leaf, bud and branch, and drive away from it the birds and beasts.' This means, consider, my royal master : you will be reduced beneath the level of man, and scarcely will the beasts of the field permit your being by them. But as, moreover, the angel said : 'But do not root up the stump, but let it be naked with the dew and rain, and unshaded, expose its remains to the sun, and let the days pass over him in misery !' so is the doom. My lord the king, the King of kings thus decrees : 'if your sins shall not be redeemed by righteousness and by showing mercy to the down-trodden, soon shall the pro-

phetic dream be reality.' But, whether you thus lengthen your peace and joy or not, still—inasmuch as the angel spared the stump—your kingdom shall continue in your race, under God's good and holy pleasure."

Nebuchadnezzar thanked the prophet, and rewarded him. In many things, for five or six months, he showed that he had been penetrated to the heart by the heavenly warning, but at the end of that time, as his sleep and his wakening were neither disturbed, he slackened in his observance of well-doing. At the end of some twelve months, he was no better than he had been at the worst period of his life.

He was strolling over the marble pavement through his Babylonian palace; he had been in the treasure room and feasted his eyes on the piles of the precious metals in heaps and piles of bars and balls; he had gone through the lower halls where a whole army of cooks at furnaces, ovens and open fire-places, were preparing all manner of fish, flesh and fowl, brought from distant countries by fleet running horses; through the stables and houses for the chariots of war and the chase, where six thousand horses of all colors and sizes, of nearly every known race, ate at marble mangers; through the armory of the royal guards, where, besides their weapons, were stored those of the king, such as spears for lion and leopard hunting, bows and arrows, swords, axes and spiked clubs; he had seen his numerous pack of dogs fed, and had returned to dine. After dinner, he had reclined on his softest couch, to see the dancers, fair women and graceful youths, trace varying figures on the slabs of polished stone, to the sweet music from flutes and pipes. He had a grateful sleep, fanned the while by young slaves, and when he had arisen and drank an inspiring cup of wine, he was, as we have said, passing again the review of his magnificence. He was standing

at the window, gazing on the many houses round about the palace, only less magnificent than it.

"Oh!" said he, "but Babylon is the greatest of cities! I built it. Babylon is the house of my boundless kingdom for strength and glory. And my palace is the gem of it reared by my might and for my undying honor!"

As the words were in his mouth, a voice not loud but still more piercing than the highest shout, not from any human being but from some invisible source in the air, breathed this sentence into his ears:

"King Nebuchadnezzar, the prophecy is now fulfilled. Forasmuch as you have taken all the glory to yourself and rendered none to the Giver, the seat of your might is vacant of you."

When they sought the king at eventide, for the supper had long grown cold on the table without his expected presence, he was found in the room, groveling on the marbles, and no word of sense could be obtained from him. He flew at them, and it was all that a dozen of the stoutest among the soldiery could do, to hold him and prevent him hurting his best friends, even his queen and his son, and himself. It was in vain that the physicians endeavored to cure the disorder of his mind, and at last, they could only say, as he would die if he was imprisoned and bound, that it would be best to try the effects of country air.

The queen governed for him, while he was living at another palace away from the city. One day, while there, he escaped, with the cunning of madmen, from the view of his guardians, and, on their searching for him, they discovered him on all fours among a flock of grazing sheep and a scattered herd of cattle, plucking the grass and eating it like the horned beasts around him. He would not suffer the keepers to approach for some time, and it was not till dark that he could be prevailed on to enter the house. But this

taste of outer air had increased his malady, and when the guardians came into his room next morning, he was gone: he had slipped through the window at the dead of night. They sought the royal lunatic on foot and on horse, but all their researches were in vain.

To fulfil the forewarning, King Nebuchadnezzar remained out of sight of his fellow-men in a hole in the woods, eating grass like oxen. His clothes were torn from him by briars or he stripped off the rags himself, so that on his nakedness fell unresisted the rays of the sun, moon, and stars, and dew and rain. So long did he remain devoid of reason in this mode of life, that his hair reached down to his waist as long in every thread as the largest feather in an eagle's pinion, and his uncut nails, when not broken, were like the claws of birds.

But, at last, his overturned brain had its balance restored, and he left the wood for the nearest inhabited place, where the people joyfully received the monarch whom they had believed to be dead.

The queen had cared for his kingdom in his absence, and he was restored to as much power and magnificence as before. But he profited by the severe lesson which he had received, and issued a decree, repeating the one he had previously published on the occasion of the wonderful deliverance of the Jews from the fiery furnace. In this he openly avowed that the Most High was of an everlasting reign and unlimited might, that man was nothing to Him, and he praised, extolled and honored the King who was farther above him than he above the meanest under his sceptre.

The shock to Nebuchadnezzar's mind, and the hurt to his body, reared in all kinds of sumptuousness and delicacy, by the protracted dwelling in the open air of a wild wood, had done much to shorten his life, and he survived not very long to be the friend of Daniel.



His son Belshazzar succeeded him.

Younger, and not having known, except by hearsay, the proofs of a greater than earthly Ruler, he began his reign with the most unrestrained revelry. Orgie after orgie, wild freak after freak, made the palace echo with boisterous laughter, and made the citizens be in terror in their streets.

In the most extensive hall in the king's house, he had had a long, long table spread with a most plentiful banquet. There sat down at it a thousand of his most eminent lords, before each of whom was set a golden cup, for so rich were the treasures of the Babylonian monarch. The wine was poured out with no sparing hand. At the height of the feast, when impiety, boldness of language, dissoluteness could go no further, Belshazzar beckoned an attendant to him.

Soon after a score of servants came into the banquet hall, each bearing a salver, on which were drinking-vessels of patterns which were very unlike the Babylonian ones. When the goblets before the guests were taken away and replaced by these, all looked surprised and turned an inquisitive eye on the smiling king, and some few, the boldest, laughed. In this laugh, the king himself joined, and he hastened to tell why the outlandish drinking vessels were so uncouth and what they were. The hilarity was universal when they heard that these were some of the trophies brought by King Nebuchadnezzar out of the Temple of the Lord at Jerusalem, which David had planned, Solomon had built, and which had been thus profaned. These were the horns used to hold the sacred oils, the wines of consecration and libations, the cups for the fat melting off the altar, and utensils for similar purposes. These, dedicated to worship, and only touched by chosen men with clean hands and the utmost reverence, were now in the jewelled and hot fingers of the rioters. This was the exquisite jest at which

the laugh ran from King Balshazzar's wine-wet lips all round the halls back to him again.

"Hark," said he, "are all the cups filled up!"

"Yes."

"In these vessels of the invisible God, we drink to the duration of his superiors the palpable, of stone, of metal, of wood!"

The uplifted goblets, washed to the brim with priceless liquid, touched the profaning lips, and was set down empty.

At the same instant, a flame covered one wall. Those on one side had it in their faces and, with dazzled eyes, started up. Those on the other, on glancing over their shoulders were equally alarmed, and, upsetting seats, dishes and cups in their affright, fled around the foot of the board. The monarch at the head, still standing up and the drained horn still in his hand, turned his eyes on the wall, and, while they were there riveted, he saw, in the midst of the fiery circle, a radiant hand holding a glittering stylet, draw on wall these words:

*"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!"*

The shining ring faded, the mysterious hand withdrew its lustre, but, unconsuming and unconsumed, the letters inextinguishably flared on the wall. All saw this, only Belshazzar had beheld the hand. He turned as pale as death and trembled in every limb, the sanctified horn escaped from his shivering fingers and rolled on the pavement.

As soon as his white and quivering lips would obey him and he had staggered back to fall into his seat, he summoned the wise men. Aroused in haste, they came streaming in from their residences in different parts of the city. But they could not decipher the unfading inscription, and could give no satisfactory interpretation of it. This troubled the king still the more, and he frantically offered fabulous rewards to anybody who should prove himself able to reveal

the secret. All over the palace, the news of the flaming characters was spread, and the servants packed the corridor and peered into the great room, where Belshazzar with his uneasy countenance glared at the wall, the object also of all the other eyes.

The queen mother was awakened by the confusion, and, on learning the cause, she hurried to the banquetting hall.

"No one can explain those unearthly letters, you say," she addressed her son. "Do not be vexed in spirit any longer. There is a man in the kingdom who has a mind above man's. In the days of your father, the late king, understanding the most clear was found in him. King Nebuchadnezzar made him master of the magicians in all Babylon. As all the other men of science have failed, and have been compelled to acknowledge their deficiencies, let Daniel, or Belteshazzar as we called him, be brought before my lord. He will prove to have an excellent mind," continued the queen, as the messengers were sent for the Jewish captive, "and to be skilful in resolving doubts, interpreting dreams or showing family secrets."

Daniel came before the throne. He had been told on the road of the reason of his being summoned at that late hour of the night.

"You being that Daniel," said the king, "who are one of the captives brought back in the march of my late sire from the Jerusalem he had conquered, your fame has reached my ears, and I believe that wisdom is to be found in you. You see—for it still glows unquenchably there—you see yonder letters on the wall. The hand that drew them there was seen by me—it was not earthly. There stand the men of science whom I have had summoned, not one of them can unravel the mystery which those figures of fire enclose."

While he spoke, Daniel was studying the inscription.

"But you can outdo them and unfold the hidden. If you do, you shall wear royal scarlet, shall have a golden chain of value and shall be next after my son : the third ruler in the realm."

Daniel, his gaze on the inscribed wall as if it fascinated him, replied :

"Keep your gifts, oh, king, to yourself, reward others. Nevertheless, I will give an explanation to my lord. Will my lord listen ? Your father Nebuchadnezzar, peace to his shade, was given by the Master a kingdom, and accompanying honor and glory so that all nations round about his territory trembled in dread of him. At his will, the most distant could live or die, be lifted up or be cast down. But he grew full of pride, and came at last to think himself above all things. At that moment, not only was he dethroned, but his kingly mind was overturned from its seat, and he lived and ate but as cattle live and feed. So suffered he until he felt that there is a God above, far, far above the earth and its dwellers. Though you knew this in its entirety, oh, Belshazzar, you have not humbled your heart, but have elevated yourself to strive to compare with the Sovereign over saints."

Belshazzar's pale face flushed ; he was not accustomed to have such unpalatable truths spoken to his face, but the letters radiating on the wall which they burned upon and yet did not burn, were sufficient chains upon his anger. With a similar awe, the soldiers and courtiers were contained.

Daniel continued, his attention enrapt in his speech and apparently careless of the lowering looks upon him.

"You had outdone yourself in impiety, but still would do the crowning act of all. To the vessels of the true God's house, sanctified to his worship, you and your lords have dared to press unhallowed lips and from them quaff

profaning liquor all to the honor of gods of silver, gold, brass, iron, wood and stone, which are but so much lifeless stuff. But no praise or gratitude has been by you given to Him from whom is your breath and by whom is your eminence. That is why the hand of heaven wrote those words, which mean: God has fixed the end of your domains, which are finished; you yourself have been judged and have been found wanting; and your divided kingdom will fall to the Medes and Persians without your gates at this moment—See!”

As he spoke, a loud cry ran from the palace entrance to the banquet room, and, heralded by it, a man, with an escort of the king's officers, was hurried into the royal presence.

“News, news, my lord,” cried twenty voices in excitement too great to make them bear in mind respectfulness; “an army, said to be the Medes, under King Darius in person have overrun the country stealthily, and have surprised the first detachment of the guards at the river feeding the main canal.”

“Yes, my lord the king,” said the man they conducted, and who had hardly recovered breath, “I killed my fleetest horse to come and give the warning. I passed many people on the road bearing their children and household goods to the capital for safety!”

Indeed, the speaker was splattered with mud, his clothes powdered as if he had been riding hard.

The monarch hastened to give out his orders, and the room was half vacant from the many who hastened to take commands of troops for the defence of Babylon, and to secure themselves, their families and treasures.

“Stay,” said he to the rest, and to some of them who had laid their hands on their swords threateningly against Daniel, whose prophecy had partly been so opportunely confirmed; “justice must be dealt out, though Babylon should fall!”



command that Daniel, hereby appointed third dignitary of the realm, shall wear scarlet and a chain of gold. Heralds, proclaim this to the people. Now, captains, go !”

But, all in vain were the most energetic orders, in vain the troops and citizens massed themselves on the thick walls and resisted the on-coming foe with missiles and sword. The warlike Medes found low spots of the inclosure, and climbing over their own dead, swept into the city. The guards fell one after another in the corridors, and, Belshazzar’s refuge being penetrated, he was no more spared than the lowest of his defenders.

King Darius the Mede took the throne. Over the conquered country, which could hardly be ruled peacefully by strangers, he placed a hundred and twenty viceroys, over whom again were three superiors, whose head was one of them, Daniel. He had been chosen from the universal opinion of his unsurpassed merit. But his enemies, for he was not so fortunate as to be without some, were envious at Daniel’s elevation. They numbered among them many of those priests and their relations whom he had had punished by the exposure of Bel the idol. They had had some success in keeping him in obscurity after the death of his patron Nebuchadnezzar, and on the accession of Belshazzar, but his present prosperity was a thorn in their sides.

They held secret meetings, and corresponded with one another to find or devise some ruinous complaint against him, but Daniel had been so incorruptible and just, that nothing could be raked up in the past to injure his standing. He was so faithful to the new master, that the present could furnish no cause injurious to him. They waited some time and watched, but he was continually circumspect and kept in the right path undeviatingly.

They remembered, then, how his friends had fallen into disgrace and in danger of death on the occasion of the gol-

den image, and how Daniel himself no less religious than they, had only escaped their enmity by more careful and secret bearing. They could find no new means, and believed that this old plan was worthy another trial. They drew up and put on parchment, these princes, viceroys, governors and satraps, a statute which they read before King Darius and to which they requested his signature. As it merely decreed that for thirty days no one should ask a petition of God or man except of the king himself under penalty of being put in the lions' cage, Darius made no delay to please these by making the writing law.

Though Daniel was one of the first to know of the issue of this manifesto, he did not obey it as he had every other mandate of his new master. As usual he knelt in his private chamber three times during the day his face towards Jerusalem, to pray that the holy anger would be turned from his native place and to give thanks for the multitude of mercies and favors granted to him, the poor captive so wonderfully raised to such supreme distinction. He did not suspect that his enemies from a neighboring house-top had been all day on the look out for his actions in privacy, and that they had, through the window he had opened to see uninterruptedly the sky over the Holy City, noted every one of his acts.

Not a moment did they waste, but, in an eager body, appeared before King Darius at nightfall and, by their leader, said :

"Oh, king, in whose hands the sceptre of government is no less judiciously swayed, than is the sword of war valiantly irresistibly wielded, have you not signed a decree that in the lion's cage shall that person be flung who; in thirty days, should offer up a petition to God or man, except to your mighty self?"

"True," answered Darius, "and the ordinance has become

one of the laws of the Medes and Persians, which are unalterable."

The accusers smiled to themselves, and in a louder voice resumed :

"There is a man, my lord the king, who in defiance of the royal command has been seen by us to make his petition to something, God or man, not once not twice, but thrice during this same day. That man—"

"Deserves the fate he has challenged," interrupted Darius heatedly. "His name—"

"He is that Daniel called by us Belteshazzar."

The king's countenance fell, but he had to send out the warrant for Daniel's arrest, against his will. He delayed and spent all the next day in trying to induce the accusers to withdraw their information against the chief viceroy, but fruitlessly. The day after the plotters assembled early and proceeded with their insisting on the carrying out of the penalty.

"Princes, counsellors, satraps," said King Darius, "for the last time, I even stoop to you, who are my conquered subjects, and request you to take back your charge against Daniel so that I may grant him the pardon he deserves, for, upwards of sixty as I am and having been ruler my whole life, yet I never have set eyes on a servant more willing and faithful and wise. I, even I the king, ask you this."

But the Babylonians shook their heads, and only a few withdrew from the rest in answer to the monarch's request saying :

"My lord, as you have said, the laws, and he is condemned by one, which are the Medes' and Persians', are unalterable, not even the sovereign who makes them can unmake or even change."

Darius frowned.

"As you will. If that decree of mine is fixed, hark to

the vow which I fix now, and it shall be as firm on my mere word of royalty as if my signet were attached. You who are merciless, shall find me without mercy. Enjoy your triumph, but beware!"

They turned pale, but they were not in the least weakened in their resolve. They even cheered one another as they followed the king into the courtyard of the palace. Daniel had been lodged there, instead of having been immured in prison, and he was now brought out to confront the king and his accusers.

At the farther extremity of the court was a large grating, inside it, in a strong stone cell, made to resemble a rocky den, were the lions of the king Belshazzar, for these animals, as being royal beasts, were almost things of necessity in the household of a monarch. Every little while, at any sound from the unwonted number of people, one or two of them would climb up, look through the bars and roar savagely in disappointment, for they expected meat, not having been fed since two days. But Daniel, much less than any of the bystanders, was not in the slightest affected by the terrifying sounds.

At the prospect of the quick satiation of their vengeance, the Babylonians had recovered their spirits and hardly bore in their joyful minds at all the remembrance of Darius' menacing speech. Reluctantly, the king gave the signal, and, first driving back the animals by pricking them with long lances and red-hot irons, the gate was carefully opened, Daniel thrust in, and then quickly closed. Fearful that the king, in his favor for the victim, and judging him by their own treacherous selves, might rescue him, the accusers induced Darius to seal up the fastenings of the grating, and let them apply their own signets to the wax also. This was done. They had heard the growling of the lions rise and then fall into an ominous silence, and they retired, confident

that, let Darius do his most, their work was already accomplished, their enmity glutted, as the beasts themselves were undoubtedly with the prophet.

King Darius was far from exultant like them. On the contrary he went into his palace almost mournfully, bidding them hush all the instruments of festivity. In stillness he passed the night; he would not eat, and he could not sleep. Slowly the hours dragged by.

Meanwhile Daniel stumbling into the pit, fell on his knees by the force of the thrusting in. He did not try to rise and vainly resist the long claws and teeth of the kings of the forest, which he momentarily expected to feel buried in his flesh. But though his flesh did creep when he felt the hot bloody breath of the beasts wafted over it and he heard them open their jaws with a dreadful snap of their separating teeth, he gradually so plunged himself into prayer that he all but forgot his dire peril. If he had looked around, he would have seen that the danger, if imminent, was, notwithstanding, perfectly withheld from him.

True, the lions, hungry and savage, had at first only recoiled with the fear they have naturally of a human being, but, the smell of their victim reviving their voracity they prepared to spring upon the kneeling form, growling and lashing their flanks with their tufted tails. But all of a sudden an invisible circle seemed to be drawn around the prophet. At that instant, either in silence or with low, lamentable howls, as if seized with a terror as violent and overpowering as could be, the lions and their mates not daring to venture within the space enclosed from them, let their couchant forms sink, their sinews were no longer stiff, their bristling manes fell as if heavy with wet, their claws drew back within their velvety sheaths, their jaws closed with a snap of the tusks, over which the bloody lips curtailed themselves, and they laid down in the corners blink-



ing their eyes in semi-sleep, afraid even to level them fully uncovered on the man in their midst.

Unable to catch the least repose, as has been said, the first gleamings of the dawn were no sooner penetrating the silken veil of the windows of the royal bedchamber than the wakeful Darius sprang off the couch, clothed as he was ready for going out. Alone, he went down the stairs, passing the sentinels, surprised at his appearance, and only delayed by having to have the keeper aroused to open the door into the courtyard. He went with swift step directly to the other end.

No sound was to be heard inside the grating, except, perhaps, a low murmur, which was Daniel's praying, but which Darius with aching heart feared to be the beasts mumbling over the sundered bones of his most faithful servitor. He had to grasp the bars to support himself.

At last, with an effort, but with his voice nearly inaudible from emotion, he faltered :

"Oh, Daniel, servant only more faithful to your Heavenly than to your earthly master, has he whom you serve so steadfastly saved you from the lions?"

The murmuring ceased. There was a total absence of sound for a space, really very short, but to the anxious monarch of long duration. Then, calm and clear, a voice responded from the depths of the darkened den :

"Oh, king, live forever! My God has deigned once more to lend his gracious ear to my supplications. His angels have closed the lions mouths, and no harm have they done me ; more than man have they respected innocency."

With a laugh of joy, and a loud cry, Darius called his men, and in a few minutes, the seal was broken, the bolts shot back, and Daniel let out into the open air.

The keepers asked if they should feed the famished lions

now but the king said sternly and significantly. "Not now, I will send the food."

And against the entreaties of Daniel, who forgave them and sought their forgiveness, King Darius commanded that the bloodthirsty accusers should be seized (which was done when they presented themselves that morning in hopes to see the living prophet dead,) and thrown from the company of man whom they dishonored in among the brutes whom they more resembled. The lions, uncontrolled this time, bounded upon the wretched men as they were being pushed in, and before one of them descended into the cavern, they were all left corpses, half devoured or with all their bones broken.

After this, not a cloud ruffled the increasing prosperity of Daniel the Prophet who resumed his station, unassailed by envy, not only through the reign of Darius the Mede, but under that of Cyrus the Persian.

*TOBIAS.*

TOBIT (one of the tribe of Naphtali, captured and brought away from Galilee by the Assyrian Shalmanesar,) before the war, had, differently to his fellow countrymen, who worshipped idols, gone regularly to Jerusalem to pay his devotions at the Temple. He preserved his fidelity even when his brother captives were compelled to live on such food as the Assyrians gave them, he taking care to eat only what his religion allowed him. His conduct led to him being chosen by King Shalmanesar as purveyor at his palace in Nineveh, and to receiving especial favor and reward. Thus he was enabled to leave ten talents of silver in the safe keeping of a citizen of Rages in Media. The disturbances in the country during the accession of Sennacherib prevented Tobit going to recover his money.

He had always remembered God. He had done many acts of charity to his suffering brothers, sharing food, money and clothing, besides burying any Jews whom he saw flung shamefully on the plain outside of the city of Nineveh. For this he was complained of, and he was forced to hide himself with his wife and his young son Tobias, while the disappointed searchers for him confiscated all his goods. But on the death of Sennacherib, the Jew was reinstated in a high position.

With a father so piously good, Tobias could not help being witness to many admirable acts and hearer of many desirable counsels. This would have been as nothing to him had he not treasured them all up for his guidance in the life hardly yet opening before him.

During the feast of the seven weeks, at which time Tobit was restored to his family, he, thankful at the new favor conferred on him, saw with an eye of acknowledgment the dainties set before him. Before he broke bread or cut meat, he said to his son :

“Tobias, run out and bring in any poor man of religion and of our race whom you may first meet. The meal shall wait.”

Tobias willingly left the room and the house, but he sought in vain for such a person as his father desired. Not a Jew, alive was in the streets. The dead body of one, however, was lying uncared for in the market place, untouched for the present by the dogs on account of so many people moving about. He hastened back.

“Father,” said he, “I can find no guest. The only one of our fellow-countrymen I could at all see is a poor unfortunate man, whom they have slain and left in the square by the market. The dogs will be tearing him very soon, father, for it is near dark.”

“Oh, well was it said by the Prophet Amos,” said the father, “that our feasts should be turned into mournings and our mirth into lamentation. Come, Tobit—eat on the way—take a bit of bread, or, no ! poor boy, I will be able to do all alone as I have done before.”

He would not take the youth with him but went out alone. He found the body sure enough, but the people were still moving about and, when Tobit lifted the corpse, passed many censures and remarks upon him for his folly.

“Anybody would have supposed that you were sufficiently punished under the late king not to transgress again and meddle with the carrion. The Jew dog does not deserve Assyrian earth to cover him.”

None of them actually attempted to stop Tobit’s labor, however, for which he was glad, and he, after dark, dug a

grave outside the city walls and buried the unfortunate wretch. As, according to the laws of Moses, he for having touched a dead body, was forbidden to lay his hands on anything which would be contaminated, he did not enter his house that night but slept outside the wall of his garden. Tired out, he slumbered more profoundly than usual and he was not aware that the dew running down from the top of the wall, trickled over stones in which were metallic ores, and thus poisoned, falling upon his face and eyes, destroyed his sight. He woke up in the morning quite blind, and none of the physicians to whom he applied could cure him. He lost his situation, his little store of money was exhausted, and, to support the family, Anna was compelled to take sewing to do for her people. Everybody knew of her husband's good deeds, both his countrymen and the Ninevites, and they all joined to help the afflicted ones by giving the wife and son employment and little presents. The righteous are never forsaken, nor shall they want bread.

Some years passed and Tobit's eyes were still sightless, He did not murmur against heaven for his affliction as some might have been so foolish as to do, and did not consider that his good acts should have prevented any punishment like this great affliction from coming upon him, but cheerfully accepted it as but a slight portion of what he, as a sinful man, merited. He was growing old, however, and he had been injured more than he could believe by the hardships of the travels of the captives from Jerusalem many months before. He thought that he was going to die.

He called his son to him and gave him advice to guide him after his father should be taken from him. And the young man answered that he would ever cherish his memory and do his utmost to become a man such as he had been, would always love God, good deeds and his dear mother for whom he would gladly work at any honest labor.



"Thanks, Tobias. Now, I can tell you something which will spare you much pain. You will not have to toil for your mother and yourself, at least from the first, as you are prepared to do. You will have much wealth in money, besides the unperishable treasure which rust cannot affect: the departure from sin and the fear of heaven. Here is a writing which if borne to my kinsman Gabael at Rages in Media will procure you ten talents of silver which I placed for keeping in his hands long ago. Now, go out into the city and try to find a guide for the journey, for I would have you on the way while I am alive."

Tobias, at the very door of the house almost, encountered a stranger, who, engaging him in conversation, informed him to his surprise and gladness, that he knew Gabael in the Land of Media, from having lived with him, and that he was, therefore, the best guide in the city. He hastened to retrace his steps and lead the man to his father.

"Brother," said the latter, already pleased with the stranger, for, most unaccountably, the latter seemed to possess, besides his frank, handsome because truthful countenance, an irresistible sweetness of voice. "Brother, may I ask you of what tribe and family of our poor scattered race, you are?"

"Do you, aged and reverend sir," said the stranger evasively, "do you seek a chapter on genealogy, or a hired man as conductor for this son of yours?"

"No offence," said Tobit, "but it can be no harm for me to hear your kindred and name, brother."

"I am Azarias, son of Ananias the Great, of your own blood."

"Welcome, brother," said Tobit, half rising in his bed and holding out his hand, the shaking of which the stranger avoided by bowing respectfully. "Be welcome, and do not be angry that I should have seemed inquisitive about your

affairs. I knew your father well, and we often journeyed from Naphtali to the Holy City together to carry offerings to heaven to the priests. He and his brother were true men, and they were not seduced into false worship like too many of our acquaintances. You are of a good race, brother. But, tell me, what wages shall I give you as guide. Will a drachm a day and all things necessary as if you were my son suffice?"

"Quite," answered Azarias.

"And more, if you return safe, I will make you a fitting present for your faithfulness."

Tobias prepared himself for the journey forthwith. Meanwhile, his mother, grieved at the thought of his departure, while her husband was perhaps on his death-bed, implored the latter not to let him go.

"Why should we send away our son, the light of our days, the staff of our weakening steps? Why should we be greedy to add silver to silver. It is dross compared to our child. It is unearthed by men, he is God-given. So long as heaven lets us have breath, we have sufficient."

"No, no, wife, pray do not lament," said Tobit, "there never was any fear of the lad, and there is none now with a kinsman of man's age and seeming experience as his guide. The boy is young, but he is able to bear the journey, he is God-fearing and, consequently brave, and—after all—he stands in the great hand of heaven no less when leagues away than by our sides. He will return in safety, who can doubt? Dry your eyes and expend your breath in prayers that the Lord of the celestial hosts will let one angel be his guardian out of His unnumberable ones."

With the blessings of father and mother, Tobias left his home. At first, he felt naturally saddened and he dared not even glance behind him for fear of tears coming into his eyes, but the change of scenery, the hopefulness and buoyancy of

youthful spirits, carried him along as pleasantly as might have been expected. Besides, though his companion did not speak much, in fact only when he was addressed, he replied in an indescribably melodious and winning voice, and spoke as few men, if any, could speak. The two stopped at the River Tigris at about dusk and, after seeing that their little bags of clothing were safely put away in the room of the hostelry, they went down to the stream. Tobias, as was the custom, went in to bathe. The guide would not do so, but stood on the bank.

Suddenly—while the youth, who had swam out from the shore into the edge of the channel and was turning to come in—a dark tip of a fin, glancing like a metal blade in the dying sunlight just above the gentle ripple, shot along down the current directly aiming at the bather. The guide shouted an alarm.

“God save you! Look!”

The young man saw what was coming : a huge fish already unfolding its gates of jaws. He began to ply hand and foot to reach the shallows. To prevent his being tired out he propelled himself with all the varieties of swimming that he knew, now shooting out hand over hand, now going like a dog or other animal, and all the time splashing and beating up the water besides shouting, to scare off the thing. But it was determined, and Tobias, everytime he glanced hurriedly over his shoulder, saw that it gained upon him and, before he could make five or six strokes more, would be upon him. He was just commending his young spirit to heaven and breathing with his quickly-caught respiration a prayer for the old couple at home, little dreaming that their loved one was in such peril, when he saw the water growing lighter ahead of him and knew he was near a shoal. He made a vigorous essay and darted forward to touch bottom so vigorously and quickly that the fish, which had plunged

towards him at the same moment, missed seizing him by only a foot or so. Tobias heard the water make a hideous sound against the closing teeth of the animal. He was on a patch of sand where the pursuer did not dare to bruise its belly and risk being grounded. He could wade at a fast pace now, and he believed for a few moments that he could reach the shore unharmed after all.

"Courage! Trust in heaven!" cried the guide on the bank, who had quickly undone the long strip of cloth that bound his girdle and had made a sort of rope of it, clumsy but pretty strong, and was now fastening a stone in one end of it so as to be able to cast it out. "Take care! the water suddenly deepens there!"

Too late. Tobias, running forward as well as he could, (for it was very hard work to walk on earth that gave way for a foot or so to his feet and to have to cut through the wave which was mid-deep,) had already unexpectedly fallen into the gully at the end of the sand bank and between it and the shore. The fish had sagaciously skirted the shoal and was already coming towards him on one side. He did not hesitate. He might have hoped to return, but he was not the one, though so young, to retrace his steps. Indeed he touched bottom before he believed he would. The fish, disappointed once, but too voracious not to run any risk rather than incur defeat again, came surging on at him. He seized it, one hand by the folds of skin over one eye and his thumb in the large socket of the flat ball, and the other hand with difficulty securing its gripe on one of the shining fins. Thus embracing it, just after barely avoiding the horrible jaws with their triple row of shining teeth, Tobias held on and tightened his grasp for dear life. The two, boy and fish, rolled over and over in the water, mud, and reeds, the great body bending to try to strike its antagonist with its powerful tail, whirling like a giant's whip.

In this awful moment, afraid to let his fingers loosen, afraid to retain them in such a tight clasp, Tobias yet had his mind sufficiently clear to offer up a prayer and again prepare his endangered soul. All his life, in varied pictures, floated before his immersed face, and all his existence was crowded into that instant. He was glad that nothing painful, no remorse, no regret, presented itself to embitter this moment. The only pain was the grief he already saw falling upon his parents.

Providentially, the two floundered in towards the bank, and so near that the guide, who had his improvised cord in complete readiness by this time, made a successful cast of one end of its coils and entangled its convolutions around the fish's tail. As if lightning had benumbed it, its forces were deadened, and Tobias, his strength reviving at so unforeseen an event, collected his energies at the same time as his thoughts and, by an effort, pulled the fish upon the shelving bank. Having sure footing now, he, with the aid of his companion, whose rope held firm, dragged the monster well upon shore by the tail first. The cloth seemed to have immensely affected it for it had rapidly lost power from the first touch of it and died, with lustreless eye (for Tobias had destroyed the other in the contest) and parted jaws.

The youth was sullied and scratched in many places from the rough skin of the fish, its sharp fin-points, and from the reeds, but, except that he was breathless and agitated by the triumph and by the thankfulness that accompanied, no injury was done to him. The guide, who tore his rope in half at the place where it had been wet and soiled, and who refolded the remaining, unmarred portion into a covering for his head, approvingly gazed on Tobias, who, washing himself first, had fallen on his knees to render up his acknowledgement of the signal grace which had been mercifully bestowed.



ed on him. When he had enrobed himself, his companion who had already assumed a fatherly manner of command which ill became a servant (as he was) and yet which Tobias did not feel inclined to resent, though why was more than he could tell, desired him to cut up the monster and remove with ease its heart, liver and gall, which he was to handle and preserve with care. He did so, and they returned to the hostelrie.

As they were on the next stage, which was to end at Ecbatana, Tobias, who had carefully put away the entrails of the fish in a bag which he carried, asked his companion for what reason he had requested him to keep them.

"The heart and the liver," said he, "has its use, which you shall presently bear. The gall is a sure cure for filmy eyes, if they be anointed with it."

Tobias started with joy,

"Will it cure my father?" he asked.

"It *will*," replied Azarias significantly.

The youth regarded the speaker earnestly, for this was not the first time that the man had spoken strangely, but his features were impenetrable. He could only believe and walk on with a lighter step, now that he carried a source of such joy to his father, by his side.

They encamped near Ecbatana, which they would enter the next day. The guide, before they fell to sleep, broke his usual silence to speak for some time in this wise:

"I have a story to tell you, my young friend, and it requires your attention because it relates especially to your father's counsel to you that you should marry one of your race."

Tobias was startled.

"I have not told you," began he.

"I know all, nevertheless," went on the guide unaffectedly. "There is a young maid residing with her father,

whose name is Raguel. Her's is Sarah. She has been betrothed seven times, but each of her affianced husbands has died by means of an evil spirit, for they were none of them worthy men and heaven let them be so punished. She is wise and fair. I will speak to her father that she may be espoused and wedded to you, for you are of her kindred and should have her."

"But, brother Azarias," said Tobias, "if seven men have already died by her, seven indirectly, may not I make the eighth. I am the only son of my parents, and I would not for a queen bring the lives of my dear father and mother to the grave with sorrow because of me."

"Do you not remember, Tobias," said the guide, "that your father bade you wed a Jewess. This one shall be given you for wife, and you need have no fear of the wicked spirit. For this is all you will have to do. Take ashes of perfumes and make a smoke with it and with some of the fish's heart and liver that you carry, and the demon will be powerless against you."

And as they went along, his companion told so many stories of the goodness of Sarah, who patiently bore the accusations and reproaches which were heaped upon her because of the mysterious deaths of the betrothed ones, that the young man began by degrees to feel an affection for her. When they entered Ecbatana the next morning, they went straight to Raguel's house, where Sarah met them—making Tobias, already prepossessed, love her vehemently—and led them into the house.

Edna the wife of Raguel on seeing Tobias, could not help exclaiming to her husband: "How much this young man resembles our relation Tobit. Ask him."

"Whom are you, brethren?" inquired Raguel.

"We are of the tribe of Naphtali, carried captives to Nineveh."

"Indeed! Do you know a relation of mine named Tobit?"

"Yes, he is well, except that he has been blind for the last few years. He is my father," said Tobias.

"You are son of a true and honest man, then," said Raguel, shaking his hand eagerly, "I am very sorry that he, of all men, should have lost his sight. You must stay here, of course, and you shall be regaled with our best, for we do not see relations everyday."

They killed lambs and set all they had of delicacies before the two. At length, Azarias began to speak of what he had already conferred upon with Tobias.

"Assuredly will I have no reluctance to give my daughter to my old friend's son. But he is a stranger here and may not know the truth. My poor daughter has been betrothed seven times, and——"

"And all those affianced men have died, I know it," said Tobias, respectfully interrupting him. I do not mind that. Let us swear and agree."

Raguel called Sarah, and the ceremony was soon accomplished according to the ancient law, and he and his wife signed the bond. They feasted, thereupon. As for the demon who had slain the previously betrothed seven, the burning of the heart and liver, forced it to flee, and not do the least harm to Tobias. The father had given him over for dead and had a grave made. He was overjoyed when he found the young man unharmed, and, in gladness, kept the wedding feast for fourteen days, having forced Tobias to remain there longer. In the meantime Azarias, who would not partake of the dainties placed before him, went off to Rages and received, on exhibition to Gabael of Tobit's order, the silver in bags, which he brought back in safety.

Still did Raguel wish to detain his daughter and his son-in-law.

"No, no, sir, I must not stay longer," said the latter earnestly, "it will not be enough for a messenger to go to them and explain my absence, for I must speedily see my father above all. Really, I must."

He had not forgotten the fish's gall, promised to be a remedy for blindness, whose efficacy he believed all the more in from the heart and liver having fulfilled their mission so completely.

"If you must go," said Raguel at last, "take Sarah and depart with our blessings. Half of my goods in bondmen, cattle and money go with her as her portion. God speed you. And, Sarah, remember to honor your new parents as you have ever done to your mother and me, and let me hear good news always of you."

The journey of the return was undelayed by any accident and they saw the walls of Nineveh in good time.

"Now, brother," said Azarias to Tobias, "let us two go before your wife and prepare for her coming."

"The more so," said the young man, feeling for the gall-bladder, in his bag, that I have a glad some duty to perform. So they hurried on in advance.

All this time the old couple had been counting the days, and when every allowance had been made for the journey and still Tobias did not return, their fears began to arise and strengthen every hour.

"What can have detained them?" one kept muttering. "Is Gabael dead? Can the money be refused him? Can it have tempted robbers on the way?"

"The boy is dead," murmured the other. "He would never have left us a great while unless he were dead. Oh, there is nothing I care for since he is gone. He is dead, he is dead!"

During all those fourteen days which Raguel had entreated Tobias to spend with him, the latter's mother mourn-

ed for him night and day, eating but enough to retain life. And, hoping against hope, she was constantly running to the door at the faintest sound, and eagerly scanning the street. And when, finally, she did see the young man, and the guide advancing thitherward she could hardly believe her eyes, into which welled tears of joy and thankfulness.

"He is coming! he is coming!" cried she, "my son, our son. And the good man who swore to care for him is bringing him."

The guide had already instructed Tobias what to do, and when the blind father, stumbled to the doorway at the cries of his wife, he, having already torn a hole in the bladder, spirted the gall into the old man's eyes. The smarting made him rub them instantly, and, instantly, he found that he could see. He fell upon his son's neck, weeping and saying:

"Praise and thankfulness to thy ever-hallowed name. O God! Thou hast punished me less than I deserved, and have rewarded me now far, far beyond my deserts. I see my wife, I see my son."

Sightless no longer, through the people of his acquaintance, who marvelled at the miracle, Tobit accompanied his son to meet the young wife. They celebrated the union in Nineveh for seven days. At the beginning of the rejoicings and festivities, Tobit called his son aside.

"Tobias," said he, "see first that this faithful guide should not be forgotten. Let him have more than his mere pay."

"Father, I was thinking of the same. I intend, by your leave, to give him half of all the cattle, money and bondmen which I received as dower of my dear wife, for I owe her to him, as well as the joy of my having healed you under God."



"No less is due him," said Tobit, "call him."

But at the first words which they spoke, the person replied :

"Do not call me Azarias nor brother any longer. I am neither. I am one of the seven holiest angels, who are blessed to be let do heavenly offices. I am he whom men call Raphael."

All around had already fallen upon their faces in reverence, for the mysteriously sweet voice of the stranger had increased its irresistible power.

"I require no reward. Be grateful to our Master, ever good as He is great. Praise, glorify, magnify Him, for that which he alone could do and has done for you all in the sight of man. And, inasmuch as God's deeds are too pure to need concealment, and as it is honorable to reveal His works to the worthy, listen. When your prayers, of each, and all, from Sarah's to Tobit's, went up to the mercy-seat, I was commissioned to watch over you. I was with you Tobit, when you left the table and food at all hours to perform pious offices to the hapless dead who might have gone unburied saving for you. For I record all these things in a book. I was with Sarah and smiled upon her patience when idle tongues reviled her for what heaven permitted for its good ends. And I have been with Tobias since he knew ill from good, and has shown himself a true son of his father, in all those things, truth, piety, reverence, honor, prayer, gratitude, for eminence in which the All-Lover loves boy and man, girl and woman. All these days I have been with you. You have not seen me. Nor have you seen me of late, but the form of one of you human beings which I borrowed. I have not eaten or drank with or touched one of you. You cannot know that I am more than a vision. Think, then, what joys beyond imagination await

the blessed who earn the unsealing of their earthly sight to celestial views. Give thanks to the Universal Giver of good. I go to him that sent me."

When, at last, heads were uplifted, the guide, the so called Azrias, the angel, was gone.

Tobit and his wife lived to a great old age and were buried together. Tobias and his wife and children then left Nineveh and turned to Ecbatana to his father-in-law. He died there, having reached the age of one hundred and twenty seven years, during all of which he preserved his reputation for eminent purity of life

*JUDAS MACCABEUS.*

SOME one hundred and fifty years before Christ, the few faithful among the Jews looked upon the saddest of sights for a lover of God in His majesty. The country around the Holy City of Jerusalem, and it itself, with the Temple especially, was shamefully treated. The best were old through grief, and the bravest were dead or broken by captivity. The priests had forgotten their most sacred vows in the most part, and their evil examples were only too gladly and too closely followed by the profane.

King Antiochus, who had that unfortunate country within his provinces, to cap the hardships, issued a proclamation, which threatened the death penalty to whomsoever among his varied conquered nations should not abandon their peculiar rites and customs and conform in every respect to the Greek's religion. He placed strong garrisons in the places where resistance was to be expected and appointed overseers to examine all accused of not complying, and compel them to obey.

The Jews distinguished themselves above all others—as the truth deserved—in constancy to the never-dying faith. The old men, though, begged to save themselves from the tortures by their friends or to pretend to yield, answered firmly that if they—men of eighty, ninety, or a hundred years of age—turned to a new belief for a desire of longer life and ease instead of clinging to the religion which had brought them so much hope and joy, during so long, young people might misunderstand and have some feeble excuse for their following the venerable and shameful models.

No, they would rather suffer the worst that their pitiless fellow man might rack them with, than run the peril of meeting one stroke from the heavenly rod. So they died martyred.

And the young, and women let themselves perish no less heroically.

One poor mother, who was compelled to behold seven of her sons cut to pieces under her eyes, consoled them, exhorted them to behave manfully as the first sufferer had done, and never ceased to promise them eternal bliss above for this speedily ended torment below. And not one of them, though breathing their last in resolution of soul, if in agony of body, equalled the calmness, hopefulness, immoveable faith of the anguished mother. She met her death like a saint.

As they could only expect to live by miracles who would not submit to the decree, those among them who were active and energetic began to whisper about making a union for defence.

Then rose up Mattathias, with his five sons, and called upon lovers of the creed (of whom he was a priest) and the country to prepare to die as became them, weapon in hand falling before the Greeks. This summons to revenge the desecration of the Temple, the slaughter of infants and greybeards, the spoiling of the nation, was circulated secretly against the coming of the officers charged to enforce the edict.

The royal officers entered Modin that town, and issued their notices, serving an especial one on Mattathias in this wise: "You are a high man, much honored in this place, and with many relations. Come you first and fulfil the royal mandate as all the heathen have done, even your fellows of Judah and in Jerusalem itself; so will you and your house be numbered among the loyal subjects and friends of

his majesty the king. You and your children shall be honored with gold, silver and other rewards."

To which Mattathias boldly replied :

"Though all the nations upon God's earth obey this king, and fall off from their sires' creed, I and my sons and my kin will never forsake the Laws and Covenants."

A Jew, in the sight of all his countrymen, was incited to take the lead and go up to the altar established by the royal deputies for the Grecian gods' worship. When Mattathias unable to contain himself for fierceness of indignation, flew at the proselyte, killed him and the king's commissioner, and pulled down the altar.

"Let him follow me!" he cried, "who would keep the Laws which have saved our fathers and will save us and ours."

He and his sons fled into the wilderness, where a great number of patriots collected around them, bringing cattle, and goods, besides their wives and children, living in caves in the mountains. The deputy commissioner, succeeding on his predecessor's death, had forthwith sent to Jerusalem for a force to go out against the rebels, and before many days a numerous host was massed against them. It was the Sabbath morning that they advanced against the Jews who, in respect for the day, would not offer any resistance, but crept far back into the depths of the caverns. The Greeks were afraid to enter into such unknown places after them, for one man there in the narrow clefts could beat back a hundred, and, ferociously determined on giving them a horrid death, they kindled great fires of brushwood and half dried grass, and, the smoke and flames entering the cavities as into an oven's mouth, the poor refugees were suffocated, whole families dying in pain, their only joy being in hope of the crown of martyrdom and in the great favor not taken from them of dying together, father and mother hand in hand, brother



and sister lips to lips, and children in one another's arms. A thousand souls thus were smothered in their innocence, preferring to be corpses in witness of the wrongful death to profane the holy day.

Mattathias hastened to convince the people that to fight heaven's battles on its own days, was not a sin. Thus they were found gallantly and valiantly confronting the foe on every day of the seven, and their forces grew in strength as the Greeks increased their severity and cruelty. But at length, Mattathias died, for he was old when he entered on the strife, leaving as adviser, to the little band of patriots, Simon, his son, and as general, Judas, surnamed Maccabeus.

Appolonius, the military governor of Samaria, to quell so dangerous a party, collected a powerful array of Gentiles and Samaritans and encountered the Israelites. But Judas, leading a chosen division in person, struck into the thickest of the combat straight at the opposite centre, penetrated it by the fury of his attack and its determination, and slew Apollonius with his own hand, taking from his death-stiffening fingers his sword, which he used ever afterwards. The enemy, being cut in two, took to flight.

This success, while encouraging the revolt, sharpened the enmity of the royalists. Seron, who was the ruler over the Lower Syria, hearing that Judas, with a rather insignificant force, had come to a certain place to bring arms for his friends who contemplated an uprising, thought to himself that he would earn a great name and no less honor if he should have the fortune to surprise him. For that purpose he detailed a strong column to move under orders which did not show its real destination. This would, doubtlessly, have come unexpectedly on the daring insurgent, for so well was the secret kept that none of the Jews, who, while pretending submission, conveyed intelligence of the utmost

value to their people's champion, suspected its aim. But it providentially arrived that an apostate, who had entered the temple dedicated to victory, heard Seron offering up his prayers and asking divine assistance for the overthrow of the arch-seditionary. Hence, Maccabeus came to be informed of the project.

Instead of attempting a flight which would probably have ended disastrously he gave the word "forward" to his little command and came in sight of the also advancing foe at Bethhoron.

"See the great army!" cried his scouts, falling back in dismay. "We, so few and weak, too, from being afoot so long, will stand no chance against their treble and five-fold ranks."

But Judas stood up before all, a splendid soldier in his weighty armor and with his conquered sword in his hand, to point at the comers-on.

"If we were man to man, perhaps we would be borne down by their weight in numbers, but we have the Spirit of the Lord of our fathers' battles to nerve our arms, the Lord who gave victory to Joshua and Gideon and countless others of his soldiers, in whose ranks I trust I am somewhere humbly placed. They come against us in multitudes of pride, hate and wickedness, we go against them like lions of Judah, poor in all but love for heaven, and our dear ones. On them, then, and your cry shall be a conquering one: For the Laws and Lives of the nation!"

Inspired so as to forget the disproportion, the little troop, three paces before whose line strode Judas, rushed down from the highlands with the war-shout, met the enemy at the base, fought till four hundred of them fell, put them to rout and slew as many more in the chase. The defeated Syrians ceased not their disorder till they were in Philistia.

This successful action belauded Maccabeus so that his fame spread to every side and reached, though the courtiers had endeavored to prevent that, to the ears of King Antiochus himself. He was fired at the idea of permitting so great an insurrection to live in his state, and marshalled a formidable host to effectually crush it. He was compelled to go himself on another expedition, but he gave the charge of this to Prince Lysias, who took half of the standing army. The latter's orders were to overcome the Jews, remove all the prisoners and put in their place strangers, dividing the ground and destroying all the artificial landmarks. This command to burn and slay was bruited about to the ears of the Jews at length.

Seeing nothing but the appeal to arms remaining, they accepted it as became gallant men. They held a grand assembly at the old place of worship of Samuel at Mitzpa, near Jerusalem, for the latter city was full of the enemy. They spent the day in public worship, hearing the laws read from the holy book, (which had been carefully secreted from the Macedonians, who left no stone unturned to find it to deface it with illuminations of their own gods) and imploring heaven to have mercy on the residue of a race once deserving of blessings and yet to be the same. And Judas, unanimously called the general, busied himself in forming an army around his nucleus of favorite soldiers.

All were of the opinion that it was better to die in battle than to live to behold the calamities of the doomed nation.

In the night-time, one of Lysias' lieutenants named Gorgias, who had added Jerusalem's garrison to his division, picked out five thousand foot and a thousand horse of the best, and made a sortie by night, stealing along the foot of the mountains to fall upon the Jews unawares.

But, meanwhile, Maccabeus had taken three thousand

of his chosen, broken up his encampment on the hill-tops, and with them (while the rest pitched their tents in a new place and guarded the women and children) marched quickly on Emmaus, where a second body of the foe were posted, awaiting the coming up of Prince Lysias, with the principal force, which moved by short stages on account of the magnificence of the commander. Thus, while he avoided Gorgias and his surprise, Judas surprised the other Grecians, and dashed his line against theirs before they could believe enemies and not friends approached.

This army had one great defect in being the escort of a number of traders and their trains, who, relying upon the apparent certainty of the royalists being vanquishers, had brought a quantity of money and rich goods with them for the purchase of the captured Jews as slaves. As they expected to buy of the soldiers and, therefore, deemed it necessary policy for the hope of better bargaining to keep friends with them, they distributed to the inferior officers and the common fighting men much in the way of presents and drinks. Hence, without the careless chief commanders being able to prevent it, had they tried, their companies were sadly in disorder by the daily dissipation.

On this divided host, did Judas and his followers, bent on doing or dying, make a charge, which met with the result naturally to be foreseen. The mercenaries, instead of facing the foe resolutely, took advantage of its not being quite daylight, to rush upon the rear where the merchants' goods were guarded, and make off with the treasure, little caring that they, the friends, took it when the assailants would be accused. Into this scarcely resisting mass, the men of Judas clove their sanguinary way. The carnage was such that the robbers of the traders were fain in their affright, to spring upon horses, mules, asses, camels, as quickly as they might and swell the line of fugitives.

In a word, Judas discomfitted them completely, with trifling loss.

The flying ones were pursued across the plains, but, though not hunted at noon, they continued their running in terror till they were stopped by the vanguard of Lysias' troops, leisurely advancing, totally undreaming of such a defeat. While they were so arrested, their pursuers had returned to the camp they had been forced to quit, and would have plundered it of its riches, but that their leader prevented that.

"Time enough," said Maccabeus, who had received news of Gorgias' out-coming, "be not greedy of the spoils, for another encounter is before us. See, the spear-points of a phalanx already glittering in the cedars crowning yon hills! Take a breathing spell, and up the mountain like deer!"

But Gorgias' men had seen the fire and smoke beneath, for some tents had been kindled from scattered brands of watch-fires, had seen the dead men, and the lion-banner of Judah floating above the conquered encampment, and had divined the whole. And on seeing the victors beginning to climb up the wooded slope, they hardly halted to hurl one flight of darts, but turned their backs in dismay, leaving all in undisturbed possession of the Jews.

Then were the pillagers let pillage.

Lysias, unable to rally a respectable army, did nothing more that season, except guard the towns. But the next year, he opened the campaign with an attack of sixty thousand choice troops against the Jews but ten thousand strong. The latter carried the victory, and so utterly, that no more opposition was made to them for months. Jerusalem was abandoned to them except the high towers of Ophel, and the Jews gladsomely did their utmost to restore



its profaned house of worship to a shadow of its pristine glory and purity.

In the year of King Antiochus' death, he dying amid great agony as a punishment, perhaps, for his cruelty to the oppressed people, Judas distinguished himself still more greatly for warlike deeds by subduing such neighboring nations as had Jewish slaves, and rescuing his unfortunate countrymen. The enemy had still retained possession of the tower in the upper part of Jerusalem, which—as the garrison sought to fling missiles upon and into the restored temple—the attempt was made to destroy. Some of the renegade Israelites who had sought refuge in the towers from the just anger of their brothers who had remained faithful, managed to escape and have an interview with the new King Antiochus Eupator, who was but ten years of age. His adviser was the same Lysias who had been defeated so disastrously by Judas Maccabeus, and, when he heard these apostates complain of his ancient enemy trying to take the fort, he was not at all unready to speak for the boy-king.

Determined to win this time, Lysias came into the district of revolution with a mighty gathering of armed men, a hundred thousand foot, twenty thousand mounted, and thirty war-elephants. This army attacked several strongholds of the rebels on their march. They were obstinately resisted at Bethsura, against which they vainly rained assaults. The news of the besieged stoutly withstanding a struggle so unequal, came to Jerusalem.

Judas was the first to take up arms and call upon others to form a legion whom he would only too gladly lead to relieve their environed brothers. As the relief party were sallying from the main gate, they were startled by seeing, as if leading them, a being in white clothing over golden ar-

mor, who rode a snowy steed with a bit of gold. Then they praised God with one voice, and took heart, declaring their willingness to engage any number of opponents.

The royalists started about daybreak, and moved to take up position at Bath-zacharia, marching with the heavy infantry and horse on the plain and the light-armed troops covering the summits and sides of the mountains. The shining of the rising sun on the shields and breast-plates of brass and steel made the hills glisten as if lamps were burning underneath the foliage of the brush.

The Jews had never faced such a force before, for numbers and variety of components unequalled.

Each wing was formed of seven or eight thousand cavalry, differently armed with javelins, bows, and swords. The centre was the foot in solid columns. Before them sedately walked the war-elephants, their sides protected with iron-sheeted leather of crocodile and rhinoceros hide, and iron plates on their foreheads. Each carried on its back, beside the Indian driver who directed them with his pointed stick, in a tower, some twenty men and an ample provision of missiles. The beasts had been made to trample upon grapes and berries to press out the juice and make them thirst for blood. Of a thousand was the cohort guarding each, and five hundred horsemen were also their escort. From the tremendous body of men and beasts, went up an appalling, confused sound, the blending of the weapons' clank, the clatter of horses' hoofs, the heavy tread of the earth-shaking monsters, and the hum of the soldiers' talking and singing in strange tongues.

Undismayed, Judas gave his signal and, while his younger troops dispersed to either side, to prevent the horse flanking them, he charged with his veterans on the enemy's left centre. They gave way there, after a stubborn stand, and

fell back so as to let the elephants into the action. Two of the conductors of these beasts were instantly slain by the shower of darts upon them, and the animals turning at the roaring cry of "The Lion of Levi and of Judah comes! make way!" could not be prevented rushing through the Grecian ranks, even breaking down a Macedonian phalanx and racing over the plain in affright in the rear of their army. The tower shaken by the motion, was quickly emptied of its men and projectiles and, its bands rending under the strain, it fell off before the animals, pierced in fifty places, dropped dead, their last hundred yards of run being rather made by their terror than by their fading life.

Meanwhile the troops of Maccabeus had slain six hundred men at the cost of fifty and, had they pressed on in the direction in which they were, they would have cut the great mass in halves and have greatly approached victory. But Judas' brother Eleazer, had been cool enough in the thick of the fight to look about him, and he had noticed that one of the elephants, which they were endeavoring to push on the right of the Jews, was larger than the others, and wore richer trappings. He believed that King Antiochus himself was in the gorgeous tower (though it was only a general,) and thought that here was a chance for the nation's work to be finely done.

"This way! this way!" cried he, turning to the side and making some forty men face in that direction with him. "Down with the tyrant king!"

He and his band began to lay about them furiously and divided men and horse up to the object of his diversion. There an obstinate resistance was offered him, and twenty, a full half, of his party fell by the thrust and cut. But the rest, separated from their friends by a serried barrier of foes, thirty ranks deep, only were invigorated by the know-

ledge of no hope being left, no retreat, no quarter, and bravely put themselves in jeopardy to get themselves a name of glory. Five on each side, and five at the back kept off the combatants who surrounded them while Eleazer with the rest flashed their blades in the air against the huge animal. It was maddened with pain, for its tender trunk was cut and slashed and almost powerless. It screamed and trumpeted, the red drops being scattered in the air from the wounded member. The driver did not dare to make it move on, for, if he did so, it would, after crushing down the handful of Jews, roll in upon the friendly line. He was pierced with two light spears and the rocking of the tormented elephant gave him the greatest trouble to keep his seat.

But the Jews were too few now to prolong the hopeless conflict. A hedge of long spears encompassed them, and between each was a swordsman, who if killed, had two to take his place, Eleazer ere long, saw the last of his comrades fall on the heap of corpses of friend and foe, in which they stood mid-deep, and he himself, bleeding at every pore with countless wounds on his unhelmed head and pierced breast, was scarcely able to stand. He was striking mechanically when a plunge of the elephant, dying like him, cleared a slight breathing-space for him by driving back the foe. Like a flash, he sprang over the pile of bodies, fell on his knees under the gigantic quadruped and buried his blood-streaming sword up to the very hilt in its belly. Down came the immense carcass breaking every bone in his body, but he—with a smile and a prayer on his lips—was dead already.

More than seven times had Judas made attempts to cut a way to join his gallant brother, but all in vain, for the surging of the human tide against his rock of troops completely prevented that. The Jews, as he saw, had lost the day, and he—with less opposition than he had hoped—drew off the

remains of his force. They reached Jerusalem without being followed, so severely had they punished the royalists. Bethsura surrendered on seeing him retire, for it had exhausted all its supply of stores.

The royal army, with a siege train more formidable than any that had ever reared its many heads of engines against the Holy City, sat down before it. The Jews while fighting the garrison who occupied Ophel, fought also around the wall against the king, erecting machines against his, sallying out to burn the hostile towers with brands, and by other means held them at bay for a long season. Fortunately for the besieged, just as they were almost giving up hope, the royalists raised the siege, and made an armistice with them for the news had come of an usurper being about to take Antiochus' throne. This made him depart in all haste.

The new monarch Demetrius having defeated, captured and killed Antiochus, did not heed the treaty but sent an army again to destroy the Jews. But Judas, the warrior, was still successful and utterly routed the enemy, killing their general Nicanor. This disgraceful repulse angered Demetrius, and placing twenty thousand men under the orders of Bacchides, they appeared on the scene of the sedition.

Judas was before Jerusalem with three thousand as all his force, which small number, to stand face to face to the legions of Bacchides, was greatly diminished by desertions, for fear of the disproportion, which lowered the supporters of Maccabeus to a scanty eight hundred. For all that this would have daunted any man less valorous and venturesome and did really depress Judas, he nevertheless, proposed to the insignificant band to prepare for an attack.

"We shall never be able—we will go down before their first opening flights of arrows," said they. "No, let us save our lives like the cowards have done. We are too few."



"Not too few to die like men of religion and love of country," answered Maccabeus. "Heaven forbid that I—I whose hand has never spared the heathen executioners of tyrants—would do such a thing as turn my back, which no enemy has ever seen, to them, if they be myriads. If our time be come, and pray God for whom we fight, that it is not, let us die for our all and leave no cause for a stain to be put on our honor."

While he spoke, and influenced his men, the columns of Bacchides had left their tents and swarmed upon the plains to the sounds of their trumpets. The men on Judas' side no less unshakenly blew on their horns. It was like a few wasps responding to a whole hive of bees.

Judas remarked that Bacchides and his chief officers were in the right wing, and to that way he turned with all quickness and force. Unlikely as the thing seemed, his little party did actually set the mass to flight and followed closely up the hills around Mount Azotus. But the left wing chased him in turn and the fugitives being rallied, the broken army enclosed all the Jews, whom they destroyed nearly to the last man. The remnant who contrived to escape from the carnage brought the news of the disaster to their friends.

Jonathan and Simon, brothers of the daring chieftain, went to the field to search for him. They found the Maccabeus' cold body scarred with broken heads of spears and barbs of arrows and striped with mortal gashes, kept nearly upright by the many dead who had perished trying to cut him down. The sword he had wrested from Apollonius five years before in the dawn of his fame was gone except the handle and a few inches of bent, hacked and split steel which his stiffened hand held firmly yet at the throat of the dealer of the final blow to him. His cloven

buckler had been flung from him some time before his death struggle.

They carried the body away and all the faithful, all the lovers of the brave and true, mourned for many days over him whom they called and remembered, long after his lamented frame had perished in the sepulchre of his fathers, Judas Maccabeus, valiant above all the valiant, the chief defender of the citizens, the leader in fact, as in name, of the host.

THE END.













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